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VAMPYROTEUTHIS INFERNALIS

Vilém Flusser

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Original text: © Edith Flusser

Edited and Translated from Brazilian-Portuguese

by Rodrigo Maltez Novaes

English translation: © Rodrigo Maltez Novaes

Project Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Siegfried Zielinski, Director of the Vilém Flusser Archive,
Universität der Künste Berlin

Technical Supervisor: Claudia Becker

Copy Editor: Anne Popiel

Cover Illustration: Georgia Burrough <http://dordburrough.carbonmade.com/>

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***Nil humani mihi alienum puto*¹**

¹ Flusser uses here a version of *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* (I am a man, I consider nothing that is human alien to me) by Terence, from the play *Heauton Timorumenos* (The Self-Tormentor), in this case to read simply, “Nothing that is human is alien to me”. [T.N.]

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And lastly, it is also necessary to mention Angelo Suzart Thomas, who introduced me to the work of Vilém Flusser during a visit to Salvador, Brazil, at a critical moment in my life – an introduction that has taken me on an intercontinental and intellectual journey, during the last four years, without parallel in my life so far.

Editor's Preface

"To come to know someone" is a process better defined by "to learn that the other is unknowable". The more I penetrate the other, the more I lose myself in his abysses. But such description falsifies the essence of the process. In reality, the other opens himself to me as long as I open myself to him. The abysmal mystery of the other is revealed by mutual suction ("attraction"), which is the essence of the dialogue between friends. This mystery has nothing to do with "the problem of man". For the anthropologist, man is a complex system, and therefore to be resolved. For a friend, his friend is not a problem: he is mysterious." (Flusser, 2007)

Vilém Flusser was born in Prague on 12 May 1920 and had to flee from Nazi persecution at the outbreak of war in 1939, arriving in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil at the end of 1940 with his wife and parents-in-law, after a short stay in London. Flusser heard of the death of his father by the hand of the Nazis by telegram, upon arrival at the port in Rio. Like many of his generation, Flusser spent much of his life and career trying to come to terms with his early life experiences in Nazi-controlled Prague, and the aftermath of the Second World War. Flusser settled with his wife and family in São Paulo during the 1940s and gradually started to engage with his new Brazilian reality, a theme that also came to occupy much of his thinking especially after the military *coupe d'état* of 1964, which had a devastating effect on Brazilian cultural and intellectual life for many following decades. As a result, in the early years of the 1970s Flusser decided to move back to Europe, settling first in Italy and subsequently in Robion, France, where he lived together with his wife and life-long collaborator, Edith.

During the years he lived in Brazil, Flusser wrote essays for several Brazilian periodicals and taught at different universities, among them the University of São Paulo and the Institute of Technology and Aeronautics (ITA). His first two books were published in Brazil during the 1960s, *Língua e Realidade* (São Paulo, Erder, 1963)

and *A História do Diabo* (São Paulo, Martins, 1965). In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s Flusser travelled most of Europe lecturing and participating in conferences and symposia, during which time he published his most well-known titles. Flusser died in 1991 after an accidental car crash as he left Prague at the end of a symposium.

Vilém Flusser came to prominence in the field of Media Philosophy after publishing his seminal book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (Göttingen, European Photography, 1984), shortly followed by *Ins Universum der Technischen Bilder* (Göttingen, European Photography, 1985) and *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?* (Göttingen, Immatrix Publications, 1987). The early 1980s were a very actively productive period for the author, when he developed and wrote some of his most important books, and *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* (Göttingen, Immatrix Publications, 1987) is a product of this period. Written primarily during the year 1981, when he mentions it for the first time in his correspondence, it was extended and prepared for publishing for the first time only in the late 1980s. The idea for *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* was started and developed through detailed research of available scientific data about this species, quasi-unknown at the time, which came to fascinate Flusser so much. For him this creature from the oceanic abysses became a metaphor and came to embody the concept of a paradoxical absolute “Otherness” that is not external or ulterior, but which emanates from within us, or by his own description: the Devil inside all of us and within our culture. This is a theme he first explored in his book *A História do Diabo*, greatly inspired by Goethe’s *Faust*. Having been a first-hand witness to the outbreak of “Hell” on earth during WWII via what he describes as the “irrational irruption of the masses” during the 1930s and 1940s, Flusser spent most of his time employing his intellectual efforts in an attempt to grasp the “fragility of reason”, as he saw it. But far from being a melancholic or pessimistic endeavour, Flusser managed to imbue his search with an undying hope of finding proof that we, humans, are in the end able to overcome this innate

tendency that makes us lean towards our vampyroteuthian, devilish nature. And in his view, it is only by staring directly at it in the mirror that we may therefore confront our own nature and thus, hopefully, overcome it. So it is in this spirit that Flusser employs his existential net to fish out *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* from the abyss within us, that we may stare at our “Other” and thus reflect on what it means to be truly “human”, in every sense.

In a letter from 1981 (included in this edition) to Dora Ferreira da Silva, a life-long friend and prominent Brazilian poet, Flusser writes:

“I cannot resist the temptation to attach one translated chapter of Vampyroteuthis, although you have written to say that you cannot (or do not want to) follow my expedition towards the abyss. I do it because I suspect that the attached chapter, more than any other until now elaborated, will illustrate to you the fascination by which I am imprisoned.”

Flusser worked feverishly on the manuscript of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*, and the exchange of letters with Dora Ferreira da Silva and Milton Vargas attest to this. Milton Vargas was one of Flusser’s main correspondents, with whom he exchanged ideas on a variety of fields. This edition includes some excerpts of this rich correspondence that serves as a “snapshot” of Flusser’s research and writing process. Vargas is an important figure in Flusser’s life as well as in the Brazilian intellectual and scientific fields. An excerpt from Flusser’s autobiography *Bodenlos* (São Paulo, Anna Blume, 2007) describing Flusser’s and Vargas’ rich dialogue is also included in this edition. Another important collaborator for the development of the text was Louis Bec, also a long-standing friend and para-biologist who illustrated the very first edition of the book.

This version of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* was translated directly from the unpublished Brazilian-Portuguese manuscript found at the Vilém Flusser Archive at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. The Brazilian version of the book is extended from the final German version and differs from it on several points. For the Brazilian version Flusser includes, for example, a critique

of apparatus at the very end of book, which does not appear in the published German version. The reasons for this are varied, but Flusser tended to work on his manuscripts between two main languages, German and Portuguese, sometimes translating the texts into English and French. This method of translation in tandem as he wrote his books was clearly a method employed by Flusser in order to help develop the texts. German was his mother tongue, together with Czech (which he never used for writing) and German was frequently used as the “meta” language in the writing process, as he described it. But Portuguese and English, despite being secondary languages, which Flusser learned and chose to work with, offered him different perspectives from which to approach the texts, and this is evident in the significant structural differences within the resulting final texts. However, the process of writing in different languages was not only a method for text development, but also evidently an effort to “tailor” each version of the texts to a specific reading audience. The translation of this version from the yet unpublished Brazilian-Portuguese manuscript brings to light a valuable text in the development of Flusser’s thought and serves to illustrate his intellectual relationship with Brazil.

Most of his titles available in English up until now have been translated from the German versions of their respective texts, so to have a first edition of his work translated from a Brazilian-Portuguese version, may, I hope, contribute to opening up the varied and rich nature of Vilém Flusser’s oeuvre to a larger international audience.

Notes on the translation

Because of the differences in the manuscripts of his books, the task of translating the texts of Vilém Flusser poses some very specific, challenging, but exciting questions to be dealt with by the translator, especially in order to keep the translated version not only faithful to the original manuscript, but also without deviating from Flusser's stylistic originality.

The first thing one may notice in reading Flusser's texts, is his excessive use of quotation marks, e.g., "xxx", which is generally considered as bad style in English and for longer texts is even considered irritating. The reader might ask – "What in fact do they signify? That a question mark hangs over these words?" and the only viable answer from a Flusserian translator, would have to be, "Yes". In an essay entitled simply "?", published in the mid 1960s in a Brazilian newspaper, Flusser argues that the climate and intention of any text lies in the author's use of punctuation and symbols. These, he argues, are the defining elements of the style of a text, and are therefore vital in the development of an author's personal style, and thus, Flusser leaned heavily on the use of punctuation and symbols in order to render a visual quality to his texts.

Flusser wrote solely with typewriters, a variety of them, rarely by handwriting, which over the many decades in which he wrote furiously, during at least four hours everyday, on correspondence, course plans, essays, books, etc. resulted in a very close relationship with the machine itself, and the technical possibilities it afforded him in relation to the development of his writing style. Quotation marks became not only a way of giving emphasis to certain terms, but also a visual strategy for adding "layers" to the meaning of a term. Brazilian Concrete Poetry had a strong influence on him, especially through the close friendship with Dora Ferreira da Silva, and Flusser's use of quotation marks is, therefore, in my opinion, his own personal method of poeticising the text by employing visual

strategies, and should be accepted as such. During his lifetime, Flusser only published two translations of his books in English, but he published several essays in English and American periodicals, which have served as references for the translation of this text, and which also have his singular use of punctuation. Flusser always worked very closely with the Copy Editors in order to guarantee the consistency of the visual nature and idiosyncrasies of his texts, and as an example, in a letter from 1987 to the Editor of Artforum magazine, C.V. Miller, Flusser writes to clarify how important he considered the style of his texts to be:

"Your editing of my papers: You are doing an excellent job and I thank you for it. There is however the following point we have to discuss in the future: You will have noticed that everything that I write has an ironic twist to it. This is eliminated by your reformulation. I understand that this has to do with your general editing policy, but still: we must talk about this in detail."

The second significant consideration for the translation was in relation as to whether to approach the text of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* purely as a scientific essay or as philosophical fiction. This decision was an important one because it would have direct implications as to how Flusser refers to the creature throughout the book. As mentioned before, in studying his correspondence, it became clear that this text is neither a purely scientific essay or philosophical fiction, because it is in fact both at the same time, and in the letters (included further in this edition), Flusser lays out exactly what he intended to achieve with the text.

Therefore, one of the main questions relating to the text today derives from the fact that at the time when the book was written, Flusser and the rest of the world had very little or no access to information about this deep sea species. However, today *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* is very well known and properly classified, which naturally poses the question, when preparing the text for publication, as to whether to approximate Flusser's fantastical creature to its

real contemporary counterpart or whether to leave it as Flusser originally intended, as a character of philosophical fiction. In this case I chose the latter, and therefore, opted to refer to the creature in the third person masculine, “he”, as opposed to “it”. Flusser’s Vampyroteuthis is closer to mythological creatures and demons, and is intended to serve not only as a mirror to humanity but also as a metaphor for the Devil (of his first written book), to which, therefore, we cannot refer to as “it”, as this, in my opinion, would be an attempt to neutralise, in the sense of neutering, the power of the image created by Flusser. This would push Vampyroteuthis away from us, and this would facilitate our need to distance ourselves from the horrific image we see reflected back at us from Flusser’s mirror – something that should not happen. So in order for us to fully grasp Flusser’s mythical creature, it may be necessary for us to ignore its relationship with the real deep sea creature, which after all, as Flusser himself points out in the main text, served only as a pretext:

“Like every fable, this one shall also be mostly about men, although an “animal” will serve as its pretext. De te fabula narratur.”

Foreword

Can one criticise a scientific text? As far as such a text is truly scientific, there cannot be an absolute “critique”, because it would have to be of a logical kind, and because the word: “scientific” intends precisely to preclude all recursion to the illogical, which would mean a distortion of the rules of the game. The exploration of the field of possibilities is precisely what comes into play here. Yet, one can, of course, always criticise a text on a rhetorical level: it is too long, it is too short, it is hardly legible, it is too simple - so many “critiques” that the reader, who is always distracted, always lazy, allows for. Human, all too human, the reader is never at the height of the ideal image that the author has for himself of the *thought consumer*.

For the author who writes this encyclopaedic essay, to familiarise Vampyrotheutis would have to mean that the reader establishes contact with a knowledge that is *de jure*,² independent from the name of the essay’s author. We do not need to know anything about Vilém Flusser when we get to learn of what happens at the seabed, we don’t need to get to know about anything but of the seabed and the organisation of synapses. And of course, we do not doubt that this text will be abundantly criticised by biologists on grounds of unlikelihood, by philosophers on grounds of incoherence, by writers on grounds of clumsiness and by comedians on grounds of mildness: it is their business, call it their mission.

However, it is not superfluous to note that the critical mind cannot work but on the very level where creative thought, while struggling to follow the arcane procedures of logic, gets astray in a maze, and therefore one may reproach it for any mistake whatsoever in the rigour of its trajectory.

² In principle.

The critique that is judging the creator cannot be of the same essence as the one that is judging the created object. This is why we have to ignore how Vampyrotheutis, before or after being born in the depths of the abyss, is born from the mind of a philosopher.

Epistemologically, there is no link between the one who creates by serendipity in his limited mind and the lesser or greater adequacy of the description that he makes of the world of possibilities by the text he crafts. We know that any critique that mistakes one for the other is a confusion of thought. A text of this kind is in itself valid for the mere sum of reflections that it causes on the fiction it presents, and thus, of the corrections it gives rise to.

Yet, on another scale, which is essentially to be separated from the preceding one, the author himself is subject to reflection, as for the process that has animated his mind. It is a particular case of heuristic process, as can be noticed here, of which we may legitimately ask (this is a question to be posed to the cold metaphysician), if it might not be the spark of a new method of philosophical thought.

Abraham A. Moles

Editor's note:

The text for this foreword to *Vampyrotheutis infernalis* was found at the Vilém Flusser Archive, amongst the letters exchanged between Moles and Flusser, and was by all accounts intended to be published with a planned French version of the book. However, because this version was never published in Flusser's lifetime, this text remained archived. Moles and Flusser engaged in a long and rich correspondence throughout the 1980s and one of Flusser's titles, *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft?* was dedicated to Moles.

After finding the text for the foreword, which was written originally in French, and translated to English by Adrian Grunert, I decided that it would be a valuable text to have as part of the project, as it sheds a little more light onto Flusser's intentions with *Vampyrotheutis infernalis*.

I. Octopi

The Genus Octopus is represented by approximately 170 species, the Genus Homo is represented by a single surviving species: we have annihilated all others. Some species of octopi are snacks: *Octopus vulgaris*. Others can reach over 10 metres in diameter and are fearsome: *Octopus appolyon*. Their formidable fangs, their pointy reversible teeth, their powerful tentacles covered with suction organs and their ferocious gaze endow them with a diabolical appearance. Other species are practically unknown: they inhabit the oceans' depths and can grow to over 20 metres in diameter. Their cranial capacity can exceed ours and they rarely come to the surface. Recently, three specimens of a quasi-unknown species were fished out of the South China Sea: *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*.

The taxonomic classification of the species is difficult. It is difficult for us to catch Vampyroteuthis in nets for fishing as well as those for knowledge. Both of us live separated by an abyss. The atmospheric pressure that he inhabits crushes us, and the air we breathe suffocates him. If we manage to incarcerate his relatives in aquariums in order to study them, they tend to commit suicide, devouring their own tentacles. But we are ignorant of our own behaviour, should he manage to drag us to the deep and incarcerate us under his glass domes in order to observe us.

Despite the barrier that separates us, Vampyroteuthis is not unknowable. He is not strange to us. He is not like the extraterrestrial beings imagined by science fiction and sought by astrobiology. We are both variations of the same game played with the calculi of genetic information that programmes all terrestrial life. The same fundamental structure informs both our bodies. His metabolism is our own. He occupies one of the ends of the same phylogenetic tree on which we occupy another end. Our common ancestors dominated the primordial beaches for countless millions of years. We separated from him relatively late, when life separated into two branches to conquer both dry land and the oceans' abysses. Both our destinies are intertwined. Both our memories harbour the

same data in their deepest layers. We are able to recognise in him part of our own being-in-the-world.

If we move forward along the tree of life, starting from him and looking for the roots, our path shall obey approximately the following itinerary: *Vampyroteuthis* is a species of the Genus *Octopus*, however not as a properly classified species by zoology³. The Genus *Octopus* belongs to a larger order called “Octopoda”, as if our own order was called “Homines” and not “Primata”. Such unnecessary terminological confusion illustrates the general confusion that takes hold of us when we come up against *Vampyroteuthis*. The Order Octopoda is composed of 36 genera of animals with eight “arms”. Octopi belong to a subclass of cephalopods called Metacephalopoda. The Class Cephalopoda itself brings together animals whose foot is combined with the head. The “tail” has devoured the head and finds itself in the centre of the foot, so that the eight or ten “arms” (octopi or decapods) surround the mouth. This class is part of the vast Phylum Mollusca, soft animals that secrete shells. Example: oysters. *Vampyroteuthis*, as incredible as it may seem, evolved from animals similar to oysters. So the Phylum Mollusca is a branch of a group of animals referred to as eucoelomates, one of which is man. We are both, *Vampyroteuthis* and humans, eucoelomates. They are the ones that matter, if we want to re-encounter what is common to both of us.

The eucoelomates are animals that would be unbelievable if we ourselves were not eucoelomates. They are composed of three tissues: the ectoderm that envelops them and defines them in the world; the endoderm that secretes liquids that digest the world; and the mesoderm, found between the defining layer and the world-absorbing layer, which allows the animal to orient itself in the world and act upon it. The eucoelomates are animals that distinguish themselves from the world, that orient

³ At the time when *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* was written in the 1980s, the species had not yet been properly classified. Now it has its own order of the same name. [T.N.]

themselves in the world, that act upon the world, and that absorb it.

There are other animals that seek to do the same, although with dubious success. Such animals form, together with the eucoelomates, the group called Bilateria. The eucoelomates distinguish themselves from the rest of the Bilateria by cavities between the mesoderm and the endoderm, by the “coelom”. Thanks to this cavity, they have a “true head” and a “true anus”. The rest of the Bilateria, be they acoelomate or pseudocoelomate, have neither foot nor head.

All of the Bilateria are worms, including men, and in this, medieval theology is not mistaken. That is: they have a longitudinal axis, a “monumental axis”, a right side and a left side. This differentiates them from the Radiata, in which several rays radiate from a centre. For us Bilateria the world is bilaterally symmetrical: there either “is” or “is not”, and *the third* is excluded. The dialectic of the worm.

The Bilateria and the Radiata together form the group Eumetazoa. They are animals composed of organs, “true organisms”. The remaining animals might be composed of several cells and several tissues (the Parazoa and the Mesozoa) but they do not have organs. We are so chauvinistically Eumetazoa that we deny such animals their right to be animals: we despise the animal nature of the sponge. The vast majority of the animal kingdom is composed of single-celled animals, the Protozoa, but as we are not capable of perceiving them without microscopes, we do not “accept” their existence, although we know that we live thanks to them, and that we will end up being eaten and absorbed by them.

Vampyroteuthes and men are organisms, beings with undeniable animal dignity. They are Bilateria, dialectically organised worms. They are eucoelomates with head and anus, which therefore distinguish between “progress” and “retreat”. Despite such existentially decisive parentage, the differences between the two are profound. Vampyroteuthis took a different path from ours in order to realise himself. His path is relatively more adventurous, so

that it is more convenient to sketch out the human path first.

The eucoelomates were able to evolve in two different directions: to develop either the endoderm or the mesoderm. The simultaneous development of both the digestive and the nervous apparatus was impractical. It is notable that we are the result of the development towards digestion and *Vampyroteuthis* towards enervation. That the eucoelomates that were heading towards man had a curious moment of hesitation. That they sought to rid themselves of their bilateral nature and opted for a radial nature. The echinoderms, for example starfish, are examples of this failed attempt. They realised that such a path is a dead-end, and took several steps in different directions, one of which, chordates, animals with a dorsal spine, proved to be the most productive. Chordates transformed themselves into a straight line, into vertebrates, like fish, amphibians, reptilians and mammals, leaving aside the divergent branch, the birds.

More dramatic is the path followed by *Vampyroteuthis*. The eucoelomates that opted for the development of the nervous system started to divide their bodies into rings, annelids. These worms in the shape of chains continued to develop into a straight line with the arthropods, the crustaceans, centipedes and spiders, and ended up developing into insects. There is no doubt that this development represents life's main advance towards "intelligence", to the super-evolved nervous system. The remaining vital developments, including ours and that of the *Vampyroteuthis*, are nothing but lateral paths relatively ill-achieved. The participants of this main evolution are animals covered by an armour that protects them from the world, and that can put forth nerves through the joints in the armour; antennae, which allow them to be in direct contact with the world. They are protected and pulsating nervous systems. The more evolved insects, the Hymenoptera, are able to evolve societies (hives, anthills) which far surpass human and

vampyroteuthian cerebration, and which will end up conquering and dominating the Earth.

However, Vampyroteuthis did not follow this victorious path. Annelids did not all opt for the passage through arthropods, but some performed another alternative not yet understood by zoology. They went back to being soft sacks, as were the primitive eucoelomates, yet conserving the segmentation at the embryonic stage. Such apparent regression by molluscs is, however, misleading. By abandoning the armour and opting for the shell, molluscs opened up a field for a revolutionary new evolution. This evolution will be sketched in the following chapter. What matters here is the visualisation of the rise of the Vampyroteuthis. Their conches are our fish, their snails are our birds, their cephalopods are our mammals, and the several octopi, edible or not, are our Neanderthals and Heidelbergenses. And there is, in Vampyroteuthis' deep memory, recollections of the segmenting tendency towards the anthill, which is missing in us.

The purpose of this chapter is not to sketch out vampyroteuthian zoology in the correct sense of the term, but to grasp the fundamental biological structure of vampyroteuthian existence. In it we recognise traces of our own existence in the world. Other traces of ours, although recognisable, are curiously deformed in him. Thus we may initiate a game with diametrically opposed deforming mirrors. A game of reflection during which we will discover our own existential structure from a point of view that is very distant from ours. It is, however, not a transcendent reflection. Although Vampyroteuthis is very far away from us, he is still with us in the world. It is a "being-with-us" (*Mitsein*). In such a way that it invites us to an immanent reflection of the world. The rest of this essay shall be a "fable": an attempt to critique our vertebrate existence from the molluscan point of view. Like every fable, this one

shall also be mostly about men, although an “animal” will serve as its pretext. *De te fabula narratur*⁴.

⁴ *Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur* (Change but the name and of you the tale is told), Horace (Satires I). [T.N.]

II. The Genesis of the Vampyroteuthis

(a) The Phylum Mollusca

We belong to the Phylum Chordata, that of animals hung by an internal coat hanger. This manifests itself existentially in every encounter with another animal: when we crush under our foot life that has bones that can break, we identify ourselves with this life. When the life crushed is soft, we feel disgust. It is possible to imagine a phenomenology of disgust that supports the hypothesis that “disgust recapitulates phylogeny”: the farther an animal is from man, the more disgust it causes. Primitive chordates, the Acrania, are worms with a dorsal spine and cause us slightly less disgust than soft worms. Fish, amphibians and reptiles are disgusting, inasmuch as their viscous epidermis escapes our vertebrate, welcoming brotherly embrace. Birds are an example of how the “collective unconscious” remembers phylogeny: the life that pulsates in a bird held in our hand is disgusting inasmuch as it diverges laterally from us. We experience this “recapitulation of disgust” more violently in the case of chimpanzees: these separated from us very late. Our vital hierarchical position is not, therefore, a scientific discovery, but is inscribed in our “instincts”.

The viscous mass that covers the globe (the so called “biomass”) is instinctively for us, therefore, a vital current whose purpose is to produce us and sustain us. If we rationalise this instinct, we can classify animals into two categories: the ones which evolve in our direction (“imperfect men”), and the ones which diverge from us (“degenerate men”). Darwin developed this rationalisation of instincts to perfection and may be considered to be politically of the “right”. Saint Frances conversed with birds, “degenerate men”, and not with salamanders, “imperfect men”; he overcame instinct with his spirit and love, and may be considered to be politically of the “left”. This fable shall follow the Franciscan example, and shall seek to overcome anthropocentrism during its contemplation of life’s current. It shall seek to grasp evolution from a vampyroteuthian point of view. To

oppose the human Darwin with a vampyroteuthian Darwin.

Vampyroteuthis belongs to the Phylum Mollusca, that of soft, slow and viscous animals. It is an extremely old phylum: there are pre-Cambrian fossils. Despite their antiquity, they are complex animals. Human zoologists classify the Phylum Mollusca as the 14th phylum among the 23 existing. However, its complexity suggests to a less prejudiced classifier, the placement of the Phylum Mollusca in the first place among the phyla.

Fundamentally, every mollusc has bilateral symmetry, but several species have abandoned one of the sides and have become “halves of animals”. The body of the mollusc consists of two parts: a sack for the intestines and a mantle. This mantle, which characterises the mollusc as much as the skeleton characterises the vertebrate, is one of life’s triumphs. Its structural simplicity and functional complexity are unparalleled among other organs evolved elsewhere. In its anterior part, the mantle forms a muscular organ, the molluscan “foot”. This foot represents the body’s mass. Example: the snail. The foot, in turn, evolves an extraordinarily mobile and sensitive head covered with sensory organs and articulated tentacles. It is probably the most intelligently designed head in the animal kingdom. The other part of the mantle secretes a spiral shell whose shape is familiar to us in the snail, and whose material we appreciate in the pearl. Still other parts of the mantle evolved breathing, locomotion, digestion, attack and defence organs. The versatility of the mantle is the foundation for the comprehension of molluscan existence.

The intestinal sack is composed of three parts: the mouth with pharynxes and oesophagus, the stomach with liver, and the intestines. The mouth contains the notorious molluscan tongue, the *radula*, covered with chitinous teeth. These teeth evolved into formidable pliers and mandibles, which supersede in ferocity the teeth of tigers and the human hand. And such flexible teeth spread from the tongue inwards into the body towards the oesophagus. In more evolved molluscs, the gastropods (snails) and the

cephalopods, there is, apart from the stomach, a crystalline spiral organ, the *coecum*, which secretes enzymes and which evokes the gold-precipitating apparatus of the alchemists.

The mantle surrounds the sack with such a force that, in more evolved species, the sack is forced upwards from the ground. "Belly up, head down!" The front part of the mantle adheres to the sack, and the back part flutters freely. Thus there emerges on the animal's back a type of cavity, thanks to which the animal may open itself to the world. It is the libidinous cavern. In it there are the genital organs and in it molluscs copulate. But in less evolved species, such a libido is not very impressive. In these the genitals are not separated from the kidneys, and our admiration of orgasm is limited if we cannot differentiate it from urinating. However, in more evolved species the kidneys are separate. This fable shall later tell at length of the admirable and vertiginous sexual life of the Vampyroteuthis.

Both sexes are practically always separated, and hermaphroditism is rare. The eggs are fertilised in the interior of the female cavity. Real copulation occurs only in more evolved species. Primitive species lay individual eggs, more evolved ones rely on more refined strategies. Gastropods give birth to offspring like mammals do, but via a different method. Cephalopods lay eggs in clusters, but never let them go. The female secretes a spiral shell through one of her tentacles and stores the eggs in it until the offspring hatch. Mother as well as father protect and feed the eggs during gestation, and the father helps the eggs to breathe. These eggs are exceptionally rich in yoke and divide in a spiral, like the Tao divides into Yin and Yang in Chinese ideograms.

As for the rest, the spiral is the fundamental theme of the molluscan organism. They are animals that twisted over themselves. They tend towards involutions in all their details, and as a whole. This tendency to twist is the molluscan "*élan vital*". This manifests itself more violently in Vampyroteuthis. His body twists until the mouth devours the tail. But in gastropods the "involute *élan*" is

not less impressive. Their body, with the exception of the foot and head, twists inside the shell until it forms a coil that loses one of its halves: the right half sees itself obliged to assume the functions of the lost left side.

The cold blood which contains haemoglobin pulsates in a vascular system filled with *lacunae*. It is pumped by a heart with three valves and oxygenated in the mantle. The tissue of the mantle is covered by cilia in all molluscs except in cephalopods, which breathe through a method unequalled in the animal kingdom. As for the nervous system, it is, from a cybernetic point of view, one of the most complex organisations achieved by life. Their basic elements are, as in our case, a ganglion centre and perceptive organs. But the ganglion centre is not a hemisphere, but a sphere, a double brain. It consists of two halves above and below the mouth, and two nerve chords that begin at the points of fusion between the two halves. These chords meet each other on the back of the belly, that is, on the “superior” part of the body, and form a circle around the body. They are analogue to our medulla. The nervous system is therefore “central” in a more radical sense than ours: a cerebral circle and a nervous one. From the “medulla” there are nerves that go to the mantle and intestinal sack to transform the organism into a system that is centrally programmed and controlled. The sensorial organs start at the mouth and are directly linked to the brain. All of this guarantees unequalled speed, precision and coordination of actions and reactions. The cephalopod brain, and to a lesser extent the gastropod brain, is of incomprehensible complexity. This obliges cephalopods to protect it with a cranium, something unheard-of in molluscs, which do not have a skeleton in their programme: life sees itself obliged to resort to vertebrate strategies to resolve this problem.

The sensory organs are banal in the case of primitive molluscs: chemical organs for balance, touch and two eyes. Organs that orient the animal within the chemical, gravitational and electromagnetic fields surrounding it. The case of gastropods is another. They have an articulated head that allows them to move their

eyes and other organs systematically within the fields in order to grasp them. Their environment therefore has a dynamic that corresponds to the organism's intentions. As for cephalopods, and above all Vampyroteuthis, their sensibility is so rich and so different from ours that it demands to be considered later in this essay.

Molluscs are originally sea inhabitants, as are the vertebrates. In the Devonian they advanced all the way up to fresh water bodies, and in the Carboniferous they conquered the continents. But cephalopods took an inverse path. They turned their back to the continents (that is, if they have a "back"), and aimed their steps towards the abyss. They sought increasingly salinated water, and can no longer tolerate low salinity. This preference for the depths and for salt is biologically unexplainable. Their high mobility and ferocity should have encouraged them to conquer and dominate the continents. The explanation of their abyssal tendency should not be sought in zoology, but in their being-in-the-world, in their hellishness.

Molluscs are cosmopolitan in the horizontal and vertical sense of the term. They inhabit every sea and every continent from the Antarctic to the Arctic, from the Far East to the Wild West. They navigate the surfaces of the seas as part of plankton and hide in depths of up to 5,000 meters. In a general sense they are slow or immobile animals. Their shells impede movement, and several species live buried. They live on the defensive. This is something surprising in animals with such a strong vital force, if taken into consideration the energy necessary to pierce through the rocky ground of the ocean floor. But none of this is valid for cephalopods: they are the fastest and most ferocious animals that exist. It is as if the whole gigantic Phylum Mollusca had accumulated the necessary energy in order to produce the Vampyroteuthis.

The Phylum Mollusca is composed of extremely diverse organisms. Oysters do not look like snails or squids. But in reality it is a phylum that is better structurally united than vertebrates. Every mollusc has a sack and mantle. All of them have the tendency to secrete shells, but they overcome the shell in more advanced

evolutions without ever losing traces of the shell. There are, however, two clearly distinct branches in the Phylum Mollusca. One of them takes the path towards gastropods, which are coil-animals, the other towards cephalopods, which are open-palm-animals. It is the inherent dialectic of the spiral.

If we consider the evolution of life as a whole, we may distinguish in it three divergent directions. One main direction goes through the annelids towards insects. One lateral direction that separates itself from the main direction, before the annelids and advances towards man. And yet another lateral direction that separates after the annelids and advances towards *Vampyroteuthis*. If seen in this way he is our antipode, not only geographically and existentially, but also phylogenetically.

(b) The Class Cephalopoda

Let us imagine the challenge to describe what is essential in mammals: it would not be possible for us to do it “objectively”, since the “mammal-ness” to be described by us is also an integral part of the defining effort undertaken by us. The classic definition: “mammals are animals that feed their young with a specific secretion” is flawed, not for being imprecise (there are animals that do it without being mammals, and there are mammals that do not do it), but for being falsely objective. It hides the fact that the purpose of the definition is an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of mammals. To assume an objective point of view in relation to cows, tigers or chimpanzees, would demand from zoologists that they overcome the human mammalian condition. Other disciplines, such as anthropology and the humanities, are more clearly aware of the problematic of objectivity, but this is also valid for all sciences: man is a being that is immersed in the world and conditioned by the world, and who cannot therefore talk *about* the world.

Certainly: objectivity can be achieved without transcending the world. The farther a specific phenomenon is removed from our centre of interest, the more objectively we are able to study it. Cows, tigers and chimpanzees are objectively researchable as far as they find themselves in a different part of the world from ours, as far as they “distinguish” themselves from us. Cows allow a greater objectivity than chimpanzees, and cephalopods a greater objectivity than cows. This allows us to build a hierarchy of objectivity: a particular science is more objective than another if the object of its study is farther from the existential centre of human interest. Astronomy is almost entirely objective (stars are distant objects), and psychology will never be objective (its object is so close that it does not even deserve to be called an “object”). Therefore, this hierarchy of objectivity suggests that the zoology of cephalopods may be highly objective: its object

is very distant, and the fact that cephalopods are with us in the world does not impede us from considering them objectively.

However, the problem of objectivity cannot be resolved so elegantly. Question: “Why do I study the zoology of cephalopods?” Answer: “Because cephalopods interest me, since they are in the world with me”. I study the zoology of cephalopods not because I am able to assume an objective point of view in relation to cephalopods, but on the contrary, in order to consider them part of the vital tide that drags me along with it. I intend to understand them in order to orient myself in my world. Science is interesting precisely because it relates to me. It is a human function just as much as breathing is: it is an existential interest. And an entirely objective science would be uninteresting, inhuman. The search for scientific objectivity is revealing itself in its continual advancement not as a search for “purity”, but as pernicious madness. The present demands that we give up the ideal of objectivity in favour of other intersubjective scientific methods.

Such new methods do not prevent us from making use of the knowledge from earlier, pretentiously objective science. For example, it is useful for us to know that cephalopods are molluscs that exclusively inhabit oceans. And that objective zoology distinguishes between two subclasses: the Protocephalopoda and the Metacephalopoda. The Protocephalopoda are extremely old and dominated the Cambrian. The Metacephalopoda consist of two orders: Octopoda and Decapoda. There are 150 genera and all are fast and ferocious animals. They have freed themselves from the molluscan shell and therefore can reach a considerable size. *Architeuthis princeps* are some of the largest animals in the history of life. They feed on crustaceans and fish and the larger species can kill whales.

Like every mollusc, they also have a sack and mantle. The foot of the mantle is twisted in such a way that the mouth finds itself in its centre. It therefore can no longer serve for locomotion, so it unfolds into several tentacles that radiate from the mouth and serve as “legs”.

But to thus walk on eight or ten legs proves to be insufficient locomotion. As a consequence it develops another organ for locomotion near the mouth which is an extraordinary organ: the jet. It works like in aeroplanes: it violently expels masses of water that propel the animal backwards with great velocity. Apart from this, part of the mantle can expand and contract in swimming movements and it has fins. Some cephalopod species can expand the mantle to fly through the air for short distances, which sometimes lands them on ships. Cephalopods walk, project, swim and fly: there is no other animal with so comparable a variety of possibilities for locomotion.

When the foot fused with the head, the mantle exerted pressure on the sack and the belly was lifted. The axis of symmetry was turned 90° and the “back” became the front of the erected body. The head became the base and support for the organism. It is an axial inversion identical to our own vertical inversion, which we were obliged to realise when we abandoned the treetops in favour of the tundra, but an inversion in the opposite direction to ours. When we erected our body, we freed our eyes for the horizon and our hands for grasping objects. When cephalopods erected themselves, their perception, locomotion and attack organs were relocated towards the ground, surrounded the mouth and came into direct contact with the brain that surrounds the mouth. These two antipodal verticalities are opposed to the normal “horizontality” of organisms.

The anatomy of cephalopods is another molluscan anomaly. They have overcome the typically molluscan shell, except for some vestiges that have a new function. To compensate, they evolved a type of secondary skeleton entirely different from the vertebrate skeleton, but analogue to it. There are ossified internal structures that support the “arms”, “neck” and fins, but above all there is the spherical skull: Cephalopods imitate vertebrates. That is because life has a limited number of models to resolve specific problems, and it resorts to the vertebrate model to resolve the problem of the complex cephalopodal organisation.

They are animals with large teeth. The teeth are omnipresent: in the mouth, where they form pliers and mandible, on the tongue, in the oesophagus, which can be projected to serve as a formidable weapon, and around the suction organs along the tentacles. The teeth have a different origin from ours: they are articulated and reversible knives.

They are animals whose digestive system has unexpected functions. The spiral and crystalline *coecum* has already been mentioned. There is a gland near the anus, the *diverticulum*, which expels ink, “sepia”, which forms floating clouds in the water, whose outlines are modelled by cephalopods. There is a gland in the mouth that secretes a paralysing venom that freezes all life around the animal. There is a gland that secretes a gelatinous mass that pervades the organism and turns it practically invisible. There are glands on the mantle that radiate coloured rays of varying intensity. And there are glands on the epidermis that secrete inks which colour the skin with varying designs.

The circulatory and breathing apparatus is equally complex. The heart pumps the blood towards the feathered organs around the mouth. The mantle contracts rhythmically to flood these organs with water and oxygenate the blood. The water circulates the mouth as the atrophied vestiges of the shell close like a zipper around the mouth. There emerges a hermetically sealed whirlpool and the animal forms a centripetal vortex that sucks in the environment. This vortex opens explosively when the jet expels water. Cephalopods are whirlpool-animals whose breathing and locomotion are synchronised.

The nervous system is directed by a circular brain made up of two halves: the “anterior” or “superior”, and the “posterior” or “inferior”, with the mouth at the centre. The body is circularly innervated, and the brain controls the nervous system in a circular fashion. The perceptive organs are not completely understood by zoology. There are two eyes which are organised identically to ours down to minute details. It is a surprising evolutionary convergence, since our own eyes are sensitive to sunlight

reflected by objects, and cephalopod eyes are sensitive above all to rays emitted by their own bodies and reflected by objects. There are multiple mechano-perceptive organs: tactile organs, organs for the perception of water currents, for the perception of the gravitational field and organs with unknown functions. Equally varied are the chemo-perceptive organs: organs for the perception of salinity and water content. There are organs that perceive the temperature, pressure, osmotic processes and electromagnetic field that are imperceptible by the eyes. There are proto-receptors that inform the brain about processes in the interior of the organism. There are secondary light-emitting organs that allow the animal to perceive objects in the eternal darkness that surrounds it. Some of the organs are situated on the tentacles and can therefore be articulated according to deliberate attention and intention. As if we had perceptive organs, and not just tactile nerves, on the tips of our fingers. The cephalopods' sensibility is more evolved than ours.

The female is bigger than the male. Her ovaries are found in the cavity between the sack and the mantle. Copulation is internal, complex and long. It is preceded and followed by prolonged nuptial rites. The male has use of three types of penises. The real penis is a flexible tube that contains the sperm, and that is what penetrates the female cavern. There its tip separates from the penis, advances towards the ovaries, deposits the sperm and dies. This tip regenerates. The second penis has the shape of a spoon which penetrates the female's mouth during coitus, goes through the teeth on the tongue and excites the female to secrete specific hormones. The third penis, shaped as a thumb, caresses the female's belly during coitus and its physiological function is unknown. This third penis serves, when not copulating, as an organ to grasp objects. As if we men grasped the world not only with fingers but also with a penis.

The fertilised eggs divide along a second spiral axis like the annelids'. The embryo develops the mantle as the first organ and the jet as the last, which is an important clue for cephalopod phylogeny. The female has use of

organs homologue to the secondary penises, thanks to which she secretes spiral shells to store the fertilised eggs. These shells are phylogenetically independent from the molluscan shell that was overcome. The eggs are kept in the shell until they have matured and the shell is permanently secured by one of the tentacles. The mother nourishes the eggs without feeding herself, and death from under-nourishment during gestation is frequent. The father dances around the eggs and oxygenates them with his jet. There are no parallels to such parental dedication to future generations.

The epidermis is greyish and is reminiscent of automobile tires. However, it is covered with chromatophores that secrete colours and that can be contracted individually or in synchrony. Colouration is not a consequence of external stimulation, but of internal processes in the organism. The animal changes colour to “express a particular interiority”. The colouration of the skin constitutes a code: the other members of the species decipher the meaning of the message. Cephalopods “speak through the skin”. During the change of skin colour, the organism can secrete a gelatinous mass that makes it invisible. He becomes to other participants of the species a mere informative surface. It is an extremely “opaque”, inter-specific communication process.

The basic cephalopod axis is the spiral. They are coils. But coils that tend to uncoil. They are springs that tend to stretch, fists that tend to open up into flat palms. With every step that they make towards the straight line, their gravitational centre relocates towards the ground. They are animals that tend towards the head. As they uncoil, they release the accumulated energy of the spring. This may explain their extraordinary ferociousness.

Cephalopods evolve in the oceans' abysses. They are the ones that most radically advance towards the head and towards ferocity. Vampyroteuthis is the apex of this evolution of life. We should follow him towards the abyss and towards the head if we wish to recognise in him our own path.

(c) The Species *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*

The Class Cephalopoda is made up of four orders, one of which is the Order Octopoda. This order is divided into 36 genera, one of which is referred to as “Octopus” (this terminological confusion has already been mentioned). The Genus Octopus is in turn divided into approximately 170 species, although we must suppose that there are still some unknown species. The name of the species *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* is not found on this list⁵, although it should be. The reason is that several aspects of *Vampyroteuthis* evoke traces of the decapods, animals that belong to another order. This should not surprise us unduly: *Vampyroteuthis* is an extraordinary species, as is the human, and the inclusion of man on the Primata list is equally doubtful. With these species the classificatory terrain is very slippery, and if we wish to resort to the research method as suggested by Leonardo da Vinci, *fantasia esatta*^{6(sic)}, it would be more towards “fantasia” and less towards “esatta” that we should lean.

Every species of the Genus Octopus are ferocious animals that have eight tentacles covered with two rows of suction organs and powerful mandibles. They feed on crustaceans which they paralyse with venom. Behind the mantle there are vestiges of the shell that has been overcome, which form an organ made up of screw and nut that can be closed, transforming the organism into a hermetically sealed vacuum.

They live in the ocean’s depths. The most evolved species have bioluminescent organs on the mantle, which emit rays of variable colour and intensity. These organs can be controlled individually by the brain and can project beams in different directions, which the animal is able to cross over each other. Light emissions happen mainly

⁵ Idem. [T.N.]

⁶ Exact fantasy. [T.N.]

during coitus and attack. The sepia cloud secreted by the diverticulum floats in the water and is manipulated by the tentacles to acquire various outlines, and above all the outlines of the secreting animal. There are lace-like organs whose function is unknown.

The most characteristic aspect of octopi is, however, their extraordinarily complex sexual life. Little is known about their ritual during coitus, so that much of the process is unknown. We do know, however, that the act of coitus occupies a large part of their lives, that it is composed of varied gestures (movements of the tentacles, of the belly, ray emissions, skin colouration, chemical secretions) and that these gestures constitute very refined and structured “public shows”. Orgasm is the highpoint of the show, but it is not the end. The male continues to dance around the female as she lays the fertilised eggs inside the shell secreted for this purpose, and the sexual rite progresses in this fashion for weeks on end until the offspring have matured.

The most evolved species can reach eighty years of age. The offspring form structured hierarchical social groups, which are so as a consequence of how the eggs were laid: in clusters. Octopi are monogamous and their social life is characterised by the tendency towards suicide and cannibalism. Both tendencies are non-economic, that is, they are independent of food. Octopi devour their own tentacles and their mates even if the environment is replete with easily reachable crustaceans. The infrastructure of the octopodal society is not economic, but sexual.

All of this refers to octopi in general, and not specifically to *Vampyroteuthis*. Of him, we hardly know a thing. If we want to study him, we are in the situation of an anthropologist who has at his disposal data about lemurs, gorillas, chimpanzees, *Pithecanthropus* fossils and three human cadavers. Nonetheless, once we have a description of the Genus *Octopus*, the outlines of *Vampyroteuthis* start to reveal themselves against the backdrop of the eternal night that he inhabits. We only need to gather the various threads of the preceding description in order to

reconstruct from them a vampyroteuthian existence, so that we may compare it with human existence.

Both *Vampyroteuthis* and man are upright beings: we assume a vertical position before the world. Our verticality came as a consequence of the turn of the spine with the elevated cranium, which freed the gaze for theory and the hands for praxis. His verticality came as a consequence of the unravelling of the molluscan spiral into an open palm with the cranium on the bottom, which freed the foot for grasping and sucking in the world. We have both overcome through this verticality our “animal nature”, since we have both come to exist in the world instead of just simply being the world. And we are both paying a very high price for this. One does not overcome life’s programme without punishment.

We men have lost our animal stability, as we lost the support that was granted us by the frontal extremities. Our belly became unprotected. Our vital “instincts” were weakened and our behaviour became less well programmed. As for *Vampyroteuthis*, he lost his protective shell. He is able to sustain himself only thanks to the water pressure that supports his organism. The price that we men are paying is a loss of ground. The price paid by him is his exile in the abyss. We are both “alienated” beings: we are alienated from the ground and he from the sky. Ours are “analogue” alienations.

A particular organ is said to be “analogue” when it performs functions identical to another organ with a different phylogeny. The eyes of the *Vampyroteuthis* are analogue to ours: they perform the same function, although they have originated from a different evolution. Both eyes have “converged”. Such convergences are not rare in the evolution of life. Although it is possible to believe that genetic information contains, as a virtuality, a great number of models for eyes, in fact it was only able to elaborate two models: the photographic (ours and his), and the mosaic (insect eyes). So that the several “primitive” eyes tend to converge towards one of the two available models. A proof of the creative and imaginative poverty of life.

A specific organ is said to be “homologue” when it performs functions different from another organ, although its phylogeny is the same. Birds’ wings are homologue to our arms. Homology is an equally common phenomenon in the evolution of life. There are whole series of homologies in the vampyroteuthian organism if we compare it to ours. His light emission is homologue to our sweat secretion. These homologies are proof of a common origin, but they are of little help in our attempt to recognise ourselves in *Vampyroteuthis*. It is the analogies and convergences that are more interesting.

For example, to say that *Vampyroteuthis* is an open palm is to say it by analogy. From the point of view of phylogeny, it is not about a “palm” but of a molluscan foot, that is, of a subdivided mantle. However, the relation between analogies and homologies can become complicated. The vampyroteuthian brain is, in its inferior layers, homologue to ours. It has the same phylogeny and it stores the same deep information. In its most evolved section, the vampyroteuthian brain is analogue to ours. Although it has a different phylogeny, and although it stores memories different from ours, it does so in such a way that *Vampyroteuthis* thinks in many ways similar to us. The brain homologies are not decisive. It is banal to establish that *Vampyroteuthis* thinks “in the end” as a worm, exactly as we do. What matters is that although his origin is different from ours, he thinks in a way analogue to our own thought.

Let us not fear to admit that vampyroteuthian thought is analogue to our own. Let us not fear to admit that he has a “spirit” or “mind”. Every attempt to limit mentality to the human species is condemned to failure. Not only because it is contradicted by animal behaviour, but because of a more convincing reason. Man repeats through embryonic development, in outline form, the stages of the evolution of life. It would be absurd to try to establish on this continuum of embryonic development a particular stage, such as “the origin of the mind”, as for example the stage from worm to chordate. We must admit that mentality is within life’s programme from its origin

since the Protozoa, and it realises itself step-by-step, as do all other virtualities in life. It is not surprising that mentality realises itself in both man and *Vampyroteuthis* by convergence, by the method of analogy.

The evolution towards mentality manifests itself, as does every vital evolution, in a growth of organ complexity (in this case: of the brain and nervous system). However, we must not forget that such a manifestation is merely “phenotypical”. That is: an observable manifestation in organisms. Thus organisms are only “superficial phenomena” in life. The essential base of evolution is not the organism, but the egg. It is the egg that contains the vital programme, and it is the egg that is “immortal”. That is, the egg is transferred from organism to organism, leaving behind dead organisms as vestiges on its way towards the evolution of its virtualities. The egg, as it migrates from organism to organism, suffers modifications in the “message” it carries. It is a game of permutations of the virtualities contained in the programme of the egg. One of the virtualities which thus realises itself “by chance” is the mind. It has been calculated that the number of possible permutations goes beyond the number of molecules in the universe. The game of permutations in the vital programme is therefore unlimited: it will never be exhausted. What is then surprising, if we observe the already realised “phenotypes” (the living and extinct organisms), is not the richness of their variations, but on the contrary, their relative poverty if compared to the realisable virtualities. The game of life reveals itself to be stupidly repetitive. If *Vampyroteuthis* has a mind that is analogue to ours, if evolution towards mentality was converging (as will be shown later), this is one more proof of the blind strategy – automatic and causal – through which life develops.

Given the unimaginative automation of evolution, it seems that there is an obvious “structuralist” method for us to reconstruct piece-by-piece the vampyroteuthian existence. For this, it would be enough to retrace our steps back to the annelids, these common ancestors to men and *Vampyroteuthes*. In them is contained all of the

vampyroteuthian programme, just as it diverges from and converges to ours. If we were to feed this programme implicit in annelids to a computer, and if we gave it instructions to compute its possibilities, we would have the vampyroteuthian programme. But this method does not work. And that is not because of some “transcendental” reason (the mysteries of life are unfathomable), but because of a very prosaic reason: in life’s game of permutations, the large majority of moves (of “mutations”), probably 99.99%, are “wrong” moves. That is: they result in organisms that are unable to live, that are “monsters”. The whole of evolution is based on the 0.01% “viable mutations”. The computer would have to eliminate all the wrong moves before it could compute the mechanism of the evolution from annelids towards Vampyroteuthis. This the computer cannot do, because its own programme is even more limited than life’s cretinous programme. So much so, that we cannot compute vampyroteuthian existence, we must “intuit it”. And we are able to do this thanks to the analogies that we have discovered in him, thanks to the tendencies through which he converges with us.

As we do this, we must not make the mistake of “admiring” these convergences as if they were part of some “project”. We must admit that these convergences are coincidences that simply happened by chance. By the way, if we consider human and vampyroteuthian existence, it becomes obvious that both are products of pure chance, of methods of “trial and error”. At both the biological and “spiritual” level, we are the result of stupid chance, both imperfect beings full of defects. Not-so-intelligent “constructions”. It is because we are imperfect that we seek to complete ourselves in the other. Even then, if we were able to synthesise man and Vampyroteuthis, we would not have managed to reach the construction of a perfect existence (as Plato seems to have believed in his “spherical being”), but only an existence a little less imperfect than ours. In reality, to contemplate Vampyroteuthis is not to contemplate perfection lost through separation, but it is to

contemplate a mirror which shows us our own imperfections, although with distorted aspects.

Let us gaze at this mirror: we see an erect, voracious belly that thinks in a way analogue to our own thought and which inhabits the other end of the Earth. We are both exiles: he in the abyss and we on dry land. We both live in a "borderline situation". "We exist". We are both pseudopods that life expelled from its body in order to overcome itself, we are both extremities of life. Thinking beings.

The extremity that we are, overcomes life in a vertical direction towards the third dimension, the one of "space". The extremity that he is overcomes life in a vertical direction towards the fourth dimension, towards a multidimensionality of the grasped world. However, we are Bilateria: both our drives to overcome are dialectically contradictory. Both of us negate our biological condition, but we do it in opposite directions. We are mirrors for each other; his existence mirrors itself in ours, and ours in his. And in this mirror we can recognise what we are both negating. We are opposing spirits that negate the same "world".

III. The World of the Vampyroteuthis

(a) The Vampyroteuthian Model

The following reading of Wilhelm Reich is possible. The concept “spirit” (*psyche*) does not refer to some object to be studied, as it tends to be interpreted by Western tradition, as well as by other non-European traditions. It refers to specific, observable processes in particular objects called “organisms”. “Spirit” means a particular behaviour in organisms. So much so, that psychology cannot be a discipline distinct from biology, but must be one of the ramifications of biology, whose purpose is the study of particular behaviours. Thus this interpretation of the term “spirit” is not a fallback to the 18th century, for which organisms were automata, nor even a fallback to behaviourism. On the contrary, it is founded upon Freudianism. The organism comes to be seen as a kind of accumulator of behaviours, as “objectified spirit”. “Spirit” is organism in movement, and “organism” is retained spirit. Effectively: “organism” becomes a synonym of the Freudian unconscious, and the analysis of organisms becomes psychoanalysis demythologised.

Seen in this way, the organism is stratified memory, just like the formations studied by geology. Whoever analyses an organism analyses its ontogeny and its phylogeny, its individual and collective “destiny”. The superficial layers of the organism, the ones that cover it, are the store of experiences that the organism has accumulated over the course of its life. They are the “repressed pressures” that the organism has suffered. They form an “armour”. In the case of humans, such repressed pressures are of cultural origin, and humans store them, above all, in the musculature. The human armour is therefore a kind of permanent cramp, which characterises the individual human’s bearing, their “personality”. The stiffer the cramp, the stronger the personality. If this cramp is relaxed, if the muscles are loosened, the personality collapses. This can happen by “chance” (for example by an existential shock), or by directed massage. Such collapse of the personality by cramp relaxation is

called “madness”. Several experiments undertaken by Reich and his disciples have proven it.

The armour covers other areas of the organism which also store pressures repressed throughout the evolution of life. They are Jung’s “collective unconscious”, but they extend far beyond the protozoa into the inanimate realm. These layers are life’s memories and are laden with latent energy that is the sum of life’s accumulated pressures during its development. The organism is a bomb that would explode if the immemorial cramp that it is were released. Such vital energy accumulated in organisms Reich calls “orgone”.

Thus the model implicit in this interpretation of “spirit” is the insect body, because in it the armour is immediately graspable. That is why Reich divides the organism, including the human, into three segments: head, chest and abdomen. The cephalic segment contains the mouth, the abdominal segment the genitalia and anus. There are only two fundamental postures of the organism. In the first the organism curves outward in a convex manner, distancing the mouth from the anus. In the second it curves inward in a concave manner, approximating the mouth to the anus. The first posture is rigid, the articulation of the Thanatotic tendency, of death. The second is soft, the articulation of the libidinous tendency, of love. The first posture, “chest out”, is the military posture and reinforces the cramp, the personality. It is self-affirming. The second posture is coital and relaxes the cramp through orgasm. It is self-sacrificing. The first posture is of war, the second of love. Every political and social reaction is founded upon the first posture, and every revolution and instance of creativity upon the second. *Make love, not war.*

This interpretation of “spirit” is extremely seductive, but its defect is that its model is the insect. Insects are not sympathetic to us, since they occupy a divergent branch from ours in the evolution of life. However, for Vampyroteuthis this objection is not valid: the annelids’ segmentation, responsible for the organisation of insects, is inscribed in his deep memory.

Effectively: the segmentation is repressed in one of his "Reichian" layers, and is sublimated as spirality in other layers. So much so, that Reich seems to be the chosen psychologist for the study of the vampyroteuthian mind. Well, what we observe in the vampyroteuthian posture is that his body has twisted into a concave form, and the mouth has approximated itself to the anus until practically fused with it. This is the libidinous posture. And with effect, Vampyroteuthis lives orgiastically. Even so, he is still more of a "warrior" than any other animal. *He makes both love and war*. This is certainly a form of existence unattended by the Reichian model.

But we may rescue the model by saying: the orgone accumulated in annelids exploded in two different directions. In the direction of the armour, of rigidity, of war, of death, which is that of insects. And in that of softness, of plasticity, of libido, which is that of molluscs. But in molluscs there occurred another explosion of orgone, the one that resulted in cephalopods. In them the softness re-concentrated itself as a cramp of the muscular foot; the foot devoured the head, and thus emerged the warlike, suicidal and cannibal existence: Vampyroteuthis. In this way, vampyroteuthian existence is the result of a double repression. On one level, Vampyroteuthis represses, like us, the pressures that stop him from living passionately. And on a second level, he represses love itself, as it is lived by primitive molluscs, and it is in this that his existence distinguishes itself radically from ours. He is the existence which has been "saved" and which refuses to be "saved". Post-Messianic existence.

This is a difficult model. According to Reich, the ultimate goal of evolution shall be reached when the mouth and anus have fused. Thus emerges permanent orgasm, which is the victory of love over death. The dialectic "Eros/Thanatos" is synthesised. Then molluscs are close to such a goal. When the mouth and the anus find themselves in the same organ, the foot, and when the two find themselves near the brain, then mouth and anus are cerebralised and the brain is sexualised. Molluscs are therefore creatures that are close to permanent orgasm,

close to the Realm of Love on Earth. And still, however, evolution bypasses molluscs and advances towards cephalopods, to Vampyroteuthis. Evolution rejects the last synthesis, and goes beyond the Messiah. It opens a new path, beyond love and towards death. From the evolution of life it becomes the evolution of death. This is a difficult and disturbing model.

In order to make it more accessible we can formulate the model in different terms. We may consider evolution as a game. The purpose of the game is to allow its pawns, the organisms, to fuse with one another by the method of copulation with the aim of preserving the genetic information in the egg. Evolution is an amorous game threatened by death, which is the consequence of the less-than-stable complexity of organisms. The strategy of the game of evolution is to make it so that love wins over death by eternalising the information contained in the egg. In this amorous game, molluscs are the last move. *End game*. And such a move initiates a new game, similar to the first, but with an opposing project. The game of death. A game which aims at the victory of death over love, of the organism over the egg. And Vampyroteuthis is the first move in this new game.

If we apply this model as a tool for our comprehension of Vampyroteuthis, we will observe that, although he is the result of the same game that produced us, he no longer plays with us. He is engaged in a different game, which for us is not playable. He is engaged in what is for us a “meta-game”. We play of love and are thus threatened by death. He plays of death and represses love, which in him is more developed than in us as humans. Our aim is to fuse ourselves with the Other in order to transcend death. His aim is to fuse himself with the Other in order to devour him and commit suicide.

This is a model that we cannot imitate, because we are not sufficiently evolved for it. The orgone has not reached in us a sufficient intensity to allow us to follow such a model. The *imitatio diaboli* is not possible for us. Because it is an anti-utopian, inimitable model. That is why this model is horrifying, and fascinating.

Vampyreuteuthis fascinates us because he proposes a model in which we recognise our own existence – without being able to, and therefore without “wanting to” – follow in his footsteps. Vampyreuteuthis is our “Other”.

(b) The Abyss

One of the bloodiest quarrels that characterises the 19th and 20th centuries has a “scientific” basis, in the pejorative sense of the term. This is the quarrel that on one side sustains the argument that human existence is determined by hereditary factors, and on the other side that it is determined by environmental factors. This quarrel may be used as one of the criteria to distinguish between “right” and “left” in politics. The rightists have a tendency to point to hereditary factors, which in their extreme, may lead to racism. The leftists tend to point to environmental factors, which in their extreme, may lead to the claim that human existence is a product of the social class to which an individual belongs. Certainly: this quarrel serves only as an ideological pretext for positions that have been assumed for reasons that are estranged to them. The rightists claim hereditary factors, because such factors escape man’s modifying, historical action. They defend heredity, not because it interests them, but because they resist every modification of the established situation in which their interests are invested. The leftists defend environmental factors because they expect that by modifying the environment, above all the socio-economic one, they will be able to radically modify human existence. So the quarrel between the supposed “hereditists” and “environmentalists” is in reality a quarrel between “reactionaries” and “progressives”. Nevertheless, there is feedback between ideology and reality, and the parabiological theses which originally served only as a pretext for real socio-economic struggles came to have real bloody consequences, above all in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.

The “scientific” basis of such a quarrel obviously does not come from science in the strict sense of the term, but from that vulgar science called “scientism”, which in the 19th and 20th centuries substitutes the religious dogmatism of previous centuries. In science itself, the

quarrel has a different face. The aim of this quarrel is to discover the mechanism that drives the evolution of species in existence today. On one hand it is an unquestionable fact that genetic information responsible for biological structures is not modified by the environment, except in special cases such as radioactivity. On the other hand, it is equally unquestionable that existing species are more or less well adapted to the environment, except in special cases such as the antlers of some particular deer. Those who are more impressed by the first piece of evidence have a tendency to assume a “Darwinian” position, and the others a “Lamarckian” position. However, neither situation is well defined, because the evidence is not well defined, because the concept of “species” is not well defined, and above all because neither situation is clearly contradictory, and they may be superseded by a third position that encompasses both.

It would be appropriate to quickly consider the inherent difficulty in the notion of species before going on to discuss how to overcome the quarrel, because such difficulty reveals the human reasoning function (that which rations). Every attempt to define one species in relation to others will come up against phenomena that refuse to fit into the proposed definition. For example, if we define “species” as a group of creatures that interbreed, although not outside the group, this will produce “hybrids” which in the majority of cases will be infertile, but which are allowed to be so. And there will be, under this criterion, subdivisions in the group called “races” which can be very different from each other, some of which may have straight affinities with another species, and some even with a species that belongs to a different genus. If, however, the definition of “species” is closely studied not at the level of the organism but at the level of the genetic information contained within the germinal cell, there will be evidence of individual and familial differences sufficiently profound to make us question the definition.

However, we still cannot dismiss the term “species” in our attempts to orient ourselves within the

realm of life. This term is the indispensable starting point for all of our theories. From it we are able to elaborate ever more general concepts such as “genus”, “class” or “phylum”. If we were to start from the observed phenomenon with its chaotic variety, we would never be able to elaborate a classificatory and explanatory theoretical edifice based on organisms. Thus, this confers to all of our theories a slightly spectral air. Because they have as their starting point fluid and ill-defined concepts that are detached from the concrete phenomena. And they work all the better the more general, the more “empty”, the concept is with which they work. The problem of distinguishing between classes is less difficult than distinguishing between species, precisely because “class” is a more abstract concept. We may then establish that theoretical reason is a good net to catch schools of sardines, but one that allows the individual sardine to escape.

This epistemological problem manifests itself in every science, not only in biology. However, biology presents a curious answer to the problem. It asserts that theoretical reason is specifically human, just as the web is specifically arachnid. The web works for the spider to catch flies, and theoretical reason works for man to catch generalities. A certain biologically-biased Kantianism (every species has its own web of specific “categories”) definitely does not work to solve the epistemological problem. Because biology is itself a product of the human “web”. It catches everything within the categories of theoretical reason, including reason itself, and not only the spider’s web. The biologically-biased Kantianism does not resolve the problem, it only transfers it to another level. And it is not in this way that we will be able to reformulate the problem of reformulating the question of *the origins of species*.

However, we can ask in a different manner. What are the categories through which we are trying to grasp the vital phenomenon that we mean when we say “species”? At this point we establish that behind the term “species” there hides two incompatible models. One is a “Darwinian”,

dynamic model: an evolutionary stream that branches out, with “species” as smaller branches. The other model is “Lamarckian” and static: the world as an ecosystem made up of “niches” and replete with life, with specific “species” occupying particular niches. Both models mistakenly resort to using the same term “species”, with different meanings. But we may build a more inclusive model which encompasses both, and which brings together the two meanings of the term “species”. Thus we may reformulate the problem. For this, we have at our disposal two meta-models, and these were mentioned in the previous chapter. We have the Reichian model and the games theory model. So let us use both in order to try and resolve the “Darwinian and Lamarckian crisis”.

For the Reichian model, the universe is an explosion during which originally unified energy (“orgone”) divides itself in divergent directions which later re-converge. At the converging points there emerge “objects”, condensed orgone. Matter, the world of objects, is condensed, “repressed” orgone. These objects start in turn to collide with each other, and this meeting of accumulated energy against accumulated energy results in ever more complex objects. Thus there emerges, at a particular moment on the beaches of Earth, super-complex objects, super-condensed orgone: organisms. These objects continue to collide and to form ever more complex organisms: the evolution of life. In this process the “hereditists” emphasise the inherent orgone in the object which becomes modified, and the “environmentalists” emphasise the inherent orgone in the object which collides against the modified object. However, in both emphases, it is in fact the same orgone. Through the introduction of the concept of “repression” the Reichian model manages therefore to overcome the antinomy implicit in the problem of the origin of species.

For the games theory model, the universe is the progressive realisation of virtualities contained within a programme. This realisation happens through permutations by chance. The informational elements, the bits, contained within the original programme go through

permutations and form, by chance, increasingly improbable systems. This occurs on both sides of a scale. On the "small" side, particles, atoms and molecules are formed; on the "large" side, super-galaxies, galaxies and planetary systems. At the centre of the scale there will emerge, according to the game and by chance, the realisation of a highly improbable, programmed virtuality: planet Earth inhabited by organisms. With this realisation, there opens up a whole new parameter for the game. New types of permutations allow for the realisation of new types of systems: the evolution of life. In this game of chance, the "hereditists" emphasise the pawns of the game, and the "environmentalists" the game board, but these are two aspects of the same game of chance. Through the introduction of the concept "chance", this model manages therefore to overcome the antinomy implicit in the problem of the "origin of species".

We are talking about models and meta-models: of instruments. The question of "truth" is not relevant: is Darwinism more "truthful" than "Lamarckism"? The truth is the relation between an assertion and an asserted phenomenon, but with instruments, that is not what is relevant. What is relevant is whether the instrument resolves a particular problem. Darwin, Lamarck, Reich and games theory are valid only inasmuch as they manage to resolve the problem of the origin of species, and not for being "true". For it is valid to say that models are abstractions of the concrete world and that they seek to force this world to fit within its categories. There emerges the danger that we may lose touch with the concrete world, and that we have lost "truth" as we seek to violate this world with models.

Phenomenology seeks to overcome this danger. By returning to the phenomenon proper. It admits that "reality" is the world as it is, in which we exist. Therefore a field of relations that holds us so that we are here and not elsewhere, now and not in another moment. The world's "objects" and our own "self" are nothing but abstractions of concrete relations. The "objects" are extrapolations of given relations, extrapolations in the direction of relational

“intentionality”, and the “self” is an extrapolation of the same relations, an extrapolation in the opposite direction of “intentionality”. Thus this vision of “reality” may be applied to the problem that concerns us. Organisms are abstractions of a particular relational fabric, and their environment is another abstraction of the same fabric. Organisms are not “realities” and neither is the environment “real”: “concrete reality” is the fabric of relations that allows us to extrapolate organisms and environment. Seen in this way, the quarrel between hereditists and environmentalists reveals itself as mere abstract speculation. Within concrete reality the organism mirrors the environment and the environment mirrors the organism. And as for Reich and games theory, they become abstractions of the Darwinian and Lamarckian abstractions.

These preliminary considerations seek to liberate the field from preconceived models when it comes to describing the vampyroteuthian habitat. It seeks to prevent us from approaching the oceans’ abysses loaded with biological theories, or others, and that we do it with the intention of “explaining” *Vampyroteuthis*’ existence. The purpose sought here is the opposite of such a “study”: we shall not dive into the depths with the aim of explaining anything, but with the aim of implicating ourselves in the vampyroteuthian situation. As we cannot observe the depths through phenomenological methods (we do not know how to dive into the oceans), we shall aim to do it by an intuitive method (diving into *Vampyroteuthis*). And as we assume, therefore, his point of view upon his habitat that is planet Earth, at the end, we shall be surprised to observe that Earth becomes even stranger than Mars or Venus.

Earth’s surface consists of 70% water and 30% dry land. The liquid surface is better structured than the continental one: the oceans’ abysses are more than 10,000 meters deep, while the maximum height of mountains is 8,000 meters. The average height of continents is 800 meters, and the average oceanic depth is 3,800 meters. The oceanic valleys are longer and more branched than

continental ones. The continental land is above all the result of past oceanic sedimentation, and the ocean floor is in the process of sedimentation, so much so that the ocean's floor is geologically "alive" and the continental is "dead". The Earth is made up of a southern hemisphere that is 80% covered by water, and a northern hemisphere that is 60% covered by water, so that it is the southern hemisphere that lends the surface of the Earth its character. The focal point of the geographic structure is the ocean around the Antarctic continent: from there the three oceanic arms branch out, the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans. The farther such branches advance towards the north, the more they are impeded by dry land, which they penetrate with smaller branches called "seas": the South China Sea, the Baltic, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and others. From Antarctica the marine currents also depart, which constitute the dynamics of Earth's geography. Such currents flow through the oceans and seas to end up in the Arctic Sea, which is the bottomless exit point of Earth's geography.

The liquid that covers the Earth and lends it its specific dynamism, so different from the relative static condition of other planets, is an aqueous solution. Its temperature varies between 25° C at the tropical surface and -2° C in the abysses. But if its temperature is relatively balanced, its pressure, on the contrary, varies wildly between 1 atmosphere and 1,000 atmospheres. The heavier the pressure, the greater the density of the aqueous solution. 99% percent of this solution is composed of chlorine hydrates, sodium, potassium, magnesium, sulphur, calcium, and other elements, plus carbon dioxide in the form of omnipresent ions.

Life on Earth consists of specialised drops of this aqueous solution. Life is a consequence and function of the liquid that covers the Earth's surface. If we imagine a planet covered by oceans (a difficult thing to imagine), but oceans that are slightly different from ours in their chemical character, we must admit that any "life" that by chance happens to exist there would be different from the one we know, and this because of its structure. We, men

and *Vampyroteuthis*, would have nothing in common with such “life”.

Ocean water is practically impenetrable to the cosmic rays that are absorbed on the surface or at the shallower depths. Sunlight, for example, is absorbed at a depth of 300 meters. The aqueous mass is bathed in eternal night, devoid of any radiation except that which comes from the organs of living creatures that pierce the darkness with their multi-coloured bioluminescence. To compensate, this dark night is extraordinarily noisy. The oceanic liquid is a good acoustic conductor, and the speed of sound waves increases with pressure and salinity. The oceanic depths reverberate with sounds whose intensity and frequency depend on its vertical or horizontal direction: constant auditory commotion.

The oceans are alive. They are literally brimming with life. Four-fifths of the “biomass” is found there. The rest that inhabits dry land are nothing but drops expelled by the oceans. The large majority of living individuals are in the ocean, and also the large majority of species, genera and classes. The largest individuals are marine organisms. The ocean is both from the quantitative and qualitative points of view, as well as from the genetic and modern points of view, the homeland of life. Such vital terrain forms ecosystems that are vibrant, interpenetrating spheres. This three-dimensional structure is hardly graspable for land inhabitants, for whom the ecosystems are bi-dimensional: territories. It is difficult for them to imagine that “borders” are the surfaces of spheres, and not lines separating surfaces: continental inhabitants have lost one of the dimensions of life. The oceanic ecosystems are of an unimaginable fertility. It is true that there are “deserts” within the oceans, regions that are not so fertilised by marine vegetation, the phytoplankton. But the great majority of ecosystems literally explode with life.

Marine ecosystems form three levels. The top level is occupied mainly by plankton, that is, by plants and animals so small that they float. The vegetable part, the phytoplankton, is the engine of terrestrial life. It transforms sunlight into vital energy which it transmits to

all other organisms. The animal part, the zooplankton, devours and digests the vegetable part and therefore “transcodes” the energy. All of this superficial life multiplies, dies and is decomposed by an astronomically numerous army of bacteria and other protozoa present. Thus transformed into powdery fertiliser, the superficial layer rains down constantly towards the depths. The oceans are saturated by such cadaveric and vitalising rain.

The intermediate level of the oceanic ecosystems is occupied mainly by animals that swim. By fish, crustaceans and molluscs. These feed on plankton, eat each other, multiply, die, and contribute therefore to the fertilising rain that passes through their level towards the abysses. Animals that swim are passageways for life as it circulates throughout the ocean, directed towards the abyss.

The lowest level, the “benthos”, is the ultimate destination of all life on earth. It is there where all vital energy generated by plankton goes, and where all fertilising cadavers go. The organisms that inhabit the “benthos”, such as walking, swimming and digging animals, form the final link in the chain of life that encircles the planet. There are no plants in this region, only animals that are similar to plants. And Vampyroteuthis dominates this region: he is the lord of all life.

So this is the vampyroteuthian environment, his habitat: the centre of the world. The Great Hole that sucks in all of life. It is permanently vivified by the manna rain that falls constantly. It is eternal night, illuminated by the living rays emanated by living creatures and reflected by the soil and by other living creatures. An eternal “*son et lumière*”, a show of infinitely variable luminosity and sonority. The ground is covered with red, white and purple minerals. There are dunes of yellow and blue sand. All around are scattered shiny pearls of glass, remnants of smelt meteorites. The landscape is covered with forests, meadows and fields of animals resembling plants that sway at the mercy of the currents, emit multicoloured lights, and move rhythmically like fans. In between such

pseudo-plants meander giant snails that glitter with the colours of the rainbow, and above fly whole scuttles of shiny red, yellow and silver crabs. A garden that whispers, shines and dances. And a garden that is there for the delight of *Vampyroteuthis*: so that he may enjoy its fruits as he sees fit. This is the abyss: Paradise.

Just to refresh our memory, let us change our point of view and contemplate the abyss from a human perspective. We see there a cold black hole under a crushing pressure, full of fear and turmoil, inhabited by viscous and repugnant creatures that eat each other with pincers and teeth. We see Hell. These are two models of the “same” environment that collide with one another. It is not that one model is “true” and the other “false”. Both are true in that they reflect particular beings-in-the-world. Environments are just as much mirrors of the organism as the organism is a mirror of environments: extrapolated abstractions of concrete relations. So much so, that neither model refers to the “same” environment.

However, if we assume a third perspective, the one of “objective” science, we observe that both models are “false”. The abyss cannot be Hell, for if it were, *Vampyroteuthis* would not have survived. And it cannot be Paradise, for if it were, *Vampyroteuthis* would not have had the need to develop a complex brain to be able to survive in it. The “objective” point of view demands a third model, equally abstract.

What happens is this: the abyss is a particular habitat that is inhabited by *Vampyroteuthis* and habitable for him, and not inhabited by men; it is uninhabitable and unhabitual for them. For *Vampyroteuthis* it is welcoming, for us it is terrifying. What we must do if we wish to “discover” *Vampyroteuthis* is to try to habituate ourselves to the unhabitual, since we cannot inhabit the uninhabitable. If we manage to do it, we may be able to contemplate that which is habitual for us as if it were unhabitual: “to rediscover” that unhabitual thing that is man.

(c) Vampyroteuthian Existence

As the preceding chapter sought to demonstrate, we must liberate ourselves from models. We must liberate ourselves above all from the model according to which existence is the meeting of a “transcendent” subject (a mind) with objects; of a “self” with a “world”. According to this model, for example, knowledge would be the meeting between the one-who-knows with what-is-to-be-known. What this model presupposes is that there could be a subject without an object, and an object without a subject, and that these might meet, just as well as they might not. This model has as a consequence the eternal problem of “realism/idealism” (what comes first: object or subject?), which is an eternal problem because it is false. We should, on the contrary, admit the concrete and simple fact that existence is a being-in-the-world that always has a subject in relation to objects and objects in relation to a subject, and that “reality” is precisely this relation.

Once that is accepted, it becomes obvious that every modification in the object implies a modification in the subject and vice-versa, because every modification is in “reality” a modification of relations. It is a modification that is mirrored, on a “secondary” level, in the subject as well as in the object. For example, when primates erected themselves off the ground, a specific relation was modified. This is mirrored in the modification of the primates’ organism and in the modification of the human environment. The erecting of primate posture freed the hands from the necessity to hold on to branches, and the eyes from the constant necessity to scan treetops in search of nests. This transformed the primate organism: the skeleton, the intestines and the brain were transformed. And this modified the primate environment: it became practical to manipulate the world with freed hands, and to theoretically contemplate it with freed eyes. The organism’s modification is clear, but the modification produced upon the world should be equally clear. Although

we repeat the erecting process during infancy, such is the modification of the world's structure that we no longer "remember" the world as it used to be before we erected ourselves off the ground.

The world's structure mirrors the organism's structure, and vice-versa. For example, the world's structure mirrors the human hand. Heidegger distinguishes between two territories in the world: firstly, one of objects that are reachable by the hands ("present at hand = *vorhanden*"), and secondly, one of objects that are available for the hands ("ready to hand = *zuhanden*"). The first territory is the future (of hands), "nature". The second territory has already been overcome (by hands), "culture". The first territory is penetrated by the hands via two gestures: "grasping" and "manipulating". The first gesture "feels" objects, the second "produces" them. Karl Marx makes the exact same discovery in relation to the hand within the world's structure. There exists in the world a territory not yet reachable by the hand, the territory of "ideology", and another which is reachable, the territory of "scientific knowledge". The hand is the criterion for knowledge: "we can only know what we know how to make".

Equally mirrored in the world's structure are human eyes. Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard remind us that there is a "world viewed from up close" (an objective world that touches us), and a "world viewed from afar" (a world of theories and models). They remind us that it is the coordination between eyes and hands that separates the world into "ontological regions". Objects that are brought close to the eyes by the hands are "concrete", while objects that can be visualised but not reached are "theoretical". Every evaluation, valuation and measurement (therefore all ethics and aesthetics) is a result of the coordination between hands and eyes.

However, it is not only hands and eyes that are mirrored in the world's structure. When the head distanced itself from the ground, the labyrinth was dislodged, and this resulted in a particular three-dimensionality of space as described by Cartesian

geometry. An elevated head resulted in the development of the neo-cortex with its symbolising centres (for example the linguistic centre), and this lent the world a “semantic” dimension: the world became significant. But above all, it was the transformation of locomotion that had radical effects upon the world’s structure. Bipedal stride, with both arms like pendulums, divided the world into present, past and future. Present: objects that obstruct the way and that can be moved. Past: objects that have already been passed through and manipulated. Future: objects that are within reach and that can be traversed. Had the organism achieved a different posture, this would have effectively created a different temporal structure, or no temporal structure.

Human existence manifests itself at one of its poles as a specific organic structure, and at the other pole as an equally specific ontological structure, and one pole mirrors the other. This is valid for every being-in-the-world, including Vampyroteuthis. His organism mirrors the abyss, and his abyss mirrors the organism. Because a vampyroteuthian existence is a concrete being-in-the-world, it is a specific being-in-the-world. We live literally in worlds specifically different. There is no “general world” or “objective universe” which is common to both. Such an abstract world of science does not exist. If we find Vampyroteuthis, it is within our world that we find him. We do not find him as existence, but as object.

However, as we find Vampyroteuthis in this way, as an object, we may suffer from a shock of “recognition”. We recognise from behind this object – as in our own hands and eyes – an existence that is comparable to ours. This is the same as saying that we are literally facing a different world. And this allows us to do a leap that transports us from our world into that of Vampyroteuthis. It allows us to be able to see with his eyes and grasp with his tentacles. It is not, in this case, about any form of “transcendence”: we are not, as we leap in this way, overcoming the world. We are leaping from world to world. It is about “metaphor”: transference from world to world. And in this way, such a metaphoric attempt is not

“theory”, but “fable”, in the exact sense of the term. We are leaping from a habitual world to a fabulous world.

It is a world that is not apprehended and comprehended by hands, as is ours, but by eight tentacles. Which therefore is not apparent, as is ours, but is made to appear by means of bioluminescent organs. Both worlds are then comprehensible and perceptible, but each one in its own way. We comprehend the world thanks to ten fingers, originally destined to allow us to leap from branch to branch. So much so, that the world we comprehend is as solid as the forest. Our purpose in knowing the world is to traverse it (“*erfahren*” = to travel through). Our ten fingers are the extremities of an organ of locomotion. Vampyroteuthis comprehends the world thanks to eight tentacles that surround the mouth, originally destined to suck in food and bring it close to the mouth. Therefore the world apprehended by him is a fluid and liquid world that precipitates into Vampyroteuthis. His purpose in knowing the world is to digest it. His eight tentacles are extremities of his digestive apparatus. Here resides the most radical difference between human and vampyroteuthian epistemology: that for man, knowing is a gesture that advances against the world, an active gesture, and that for Vampyroteuthis, knowing is a gesture that grasps the world, a passive gesture. We men know with the aim of resolving “problems”, and Vampyroteuthis knows with the aim of discriminating between the “influences” and “impressions” that he suffers.

Both worlds, vampyroteuthian and ours, are “objective”. That is: it does not matter what we apprehend; if it can be grasped, “conceived” and “defined”, it is an “object”. And everything that can be “established” by this grasping of outlines is *ipso facto* modifiable. Both men and Vampyroteuthis are apt to modify the world; we by “manipulation” and he by “tentaculation”. If we define “culture” as the “deliberate modification of the world by a subject”, then “culture” is inherent in the human as well as the vampyroteuthian programme. However, they are two different concepts of culture. For men, the world to be modified consists of problems that bar the way, and

“culture” is the removal of problems to clear paths. Culture in this sense is an emancipatory enterprise, and is therefore a “project” against objects. For Vampyroteuthis, the world to be modified consists of impressions that precipitate towards him, and “culture” is the incorporation of impressions to digest them. Culture in this sense is an integrating enterprise, and is an “injection” of objects. Culture in the human sense is a removal of “nature”, and culture in the vampyroteuthian sense is a critique of “nature”.

Our world appears. That is: it seems to emit light rays. “In reality”, however, such light rays are emitted by the sun and only reflected by objects. Appearances deceive. Men must go “beyond” appearances if they want to see the true light that appearances hide (“*aletheia*”). The world of Vampyroteuthis is a dark night, and Vampyroteuthis emits light rays in order to make objects appear. “Phenomena”, appearances, are produced by Vampyroteuthis from the dark night. They are produced according to his intention, according to the intensity, the colouration and the direction of the light rays emitted by him. His bioluminescent organs are his “categories of perception”. The “naïve” attitude of man before the world of appearances is Platonic; the “naïve” attitude of Vampyroteuthis is Kantian.

Our genital apparatus is located on the opposite side of the body in relation to the hands and eyes. Our brain must coordinate such opposite functions of the body. It must coordinate the experiences collected by the hands with the ones collected by the eyes, and then it must coordinate such coordinated experiences with the ones collected by the genitalia. Therefore contradictions emerge in the human brain. Our brain doubts, and our world becomes thus doubtful. The genital apparatus of the Vampyroteuthis can be found near the tentacles and the eyes, and all three organs are strictly linked to the brain. Experiences collected by the three organs are transmitted to the brain as compact informative units to be processed. This information is not contradictory, and everything has a sexual colouration. The vampyroteuthian brain does not

doubt. And the vampyroteuthian world deserves trust. Our fundamental attitude towards the world is one of Cartesian doubt, the vampyroteuthian attitude towards the world is one of Aristotelian admiration.

Human existence, as well as vampyroteuthian attitude, are consequences of a schism in the concrete relation between a “subject” on one side and an “object” on the other. This schism occurs when the relation becomes excessively complex. We know approximately how this schism occurred in the case of humans. When the climate cooled down tens of thousands of years ago, the trees became sparse and the landscape became tundra. The primates that inhabited the treetops saw themselves in the “open space” of the steppe. Their eyes instead of perceiving leafy bushes started to perceive horizons, and their fingers instead of feeling for nests started to feel bones and stones on the surface of the tundra. In this strange world in which primates were foreigners, they started to manipulate bones and stones in order to transform them into “mediations” with this strange world, and into “tools” to overcome their alienation from the world. Primates became men.

We do not know anything of the schism between subject and object in the vampyroteuthian case, although we know that the process must have been comparable to our own schism, since the relation “Vampyroteuthis/world” is at least as complex as the relation “man/world”. However, although we are ignorant of everything about the process, we can intuit it. The mollusc, a slow and passive organism, became at a particular moment of evolution a ferocious, fast and versatile animal. It must have been at this moment that the schism between subject and object occurred. What is important in this reflection is that we should understand that the turn from slow passivity into fast ferociousness is not a turn from passivity to activity, but from passivity to violent passion. When Vampyroteuthis assumed his position as subject of his world, he did not occupy, as man did, the active pole in his relation with the world, but the passive pole. The world is not for him, as it is for us, an opposite pole that has to be grasped actively. The world for

him is an opposite pole that has to be sucked in passionately. The world is not, as it is for us, a “field of action”, but a “sphere of experiences”. If we men were to project our existence “beyond” the world, we would have on the other side of the world an active transcendent subject, God. If Vampyroteuthis were to project his existence thus, he would have on the other side of the world a passionate transcendent subject, the Devil.

All of this implies that the ontological categories of the vampyroteuthian world are different from the ones of the human world. They are the categories of the “passion of night”, while ours are those of the “light of day”. The vampyroteuthian world is the world of dreams, ours is that of waking reason. Certainly, such a difference must not be exaggerated. Vampyroteuthis is not a pure Romantic, as neither are we pure men of the Enlightenment. The complexity of both our cerebral organisations ensures that both of us are able to reason and dream. However, both such tendencies are inversely situated in us. Our conscience is the vampyroteuthian unconscious, and vice-versa. This is reflected in our respective postures: the position of our head corresponds to the position of his belly. If Vampyroteuthis analyses the world, he is doing “depth analysis”, and if he analyses his own being-in-the-world, he is doing a “critique of reason”. His Newton is Freud and his Jung is Einstein.

Vampyroteuthis is sexually excited by the world. He grasps the world with tentacles equipped with penis and clitoris. He apprehends and comprehends with sexual excitement, and concepts lead him to orgasm. For him the world is not sexually neutral and therefore insipid as it is for men. For him, everything has male or female knowledge and is therefore exciting. The male conceives of the world using different categories than the female does, and so there are male and female “laws of nature”. The world is not made of “neutral stuff” but of “matter” and “*pater*”, and the dialectic of the sexes is the dialectic of the world. All the other dialectics between truth and falsehood, between beauty and ugliness or between Good and Evil, are reducible to the dialectic of sex. And every dialectic is

surmountable by fusion, by coitus, by orgasm. Both the dialectic “wave/particle” and the dialectic “mass/energy” are tensions aimed at orgasm. That is because *Vampyroteuthis* did not repress the female aspect of the world like man has. For him, the world has both dimensions which have to be synthesised. That is why *Vampyroteuthis* does not aim to reunite the world’s contradictions via theoretical edifices like man has, but via the vertigo of orgasm.

This tendency is mirrored in the cerebral structure of both our organisms. Our brain consists of two hemispheres, and the left one is more developed than the right one. His brain is a sphere divided into two halves. Our dialectic is a line that joins the two halves of our brain; his dialectic is a circle that runs through both halves of the brain. His dialectic is circular and not oscillatory like ours is. Our dialectic is linear, and his is coiled. We think “straight”, he thinks “in a circle”. We think “syllogistically”, he thinks “involuntarily”. That is because our world is a plane and his a volume.

Our world is a plane, a tundra, and the objects of the world are humps on the plane, hills and mountains. For him, planes are inexistent abstractions. Even the ocean floor is not a plane for him, but a vessel for water. He lives in three-dimensionality: he licks it with his tongue covered with teeth. That is why he did not pass from the second to the third dimension when he erected himself, as did men. But as he erected himself, he twisted the third dimension into a spiral in order to penetrate a kind of fourth dimension, the coil. When he moves, he does not advance, as we do, along the second dimension towards the third. But he projects, within the third dimension, towards a fourth. His posture does not deny the second dimension, as ours does, but perforates the third dimension just like a screw. We negate the world perpendicularly, and he spirally. Our dialectics are different from each other.

His existence is twisted, as is the snail’s. But contrary to the snail, it is a twisting aimed at opening himself to the world. This lends a particular structure to his space. For men, space is an inert extension sustained

by an internal Cartesian skeleton. For him, space is a twisted tension sustained by an external spiral shell. For us, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. For him, the shortest distance is a coil, which makes the two points coincide when retracted. His geometry is dynamic. There cannot be for him an immutable form. He is not Platonic, he is orgasmic. He does not do philosophical contemplation, but philosophical vertigo and its posture.

Both men and Vampyreuteuthis exist, objectively speaking, on planet Earth. But it would be a mistake to think that we exist on the "same Earth". We exist on an Earth that is a habitable surface. He exists on an Earth that is a habitable hole. Nevertheless, we can meet. At such an encounter, the two Earths should coincide with one another and produce a new Earth. An Earth that would have both vampyreuteuthian and human characteristics. But to say this is to articulate a specifically human expectation. This is because we humans embrace the world with the intention to conceal it. He, on the contrary, embraces the world with the intention of incorporating it. For him the encounter between the two Earths would be the absorption of the human Earth by the vampyreuteuthian one. That is because we love the world, although we fight against it, and he hates the world, even though he delights himself in it.

From our point of view, Vampyreuteuthis is a spiteful existence. From his point of view, man is a tedious existence. To us he is horrible. To him we are insipid. No mutual embrace could ever alter such an existential difference, which is the difference between both of our beings-in-the-world. We are not complementary. We are opposites, like mirrors. Every attempt to transform Vampyreuteuthis into a human complement is a betrayal of human existence, a dangerous romanticism. It is pointless to try to minimise this: Vampyreuteuthis is our Hell.

Vampyroteuthis infernalis. The rest of this fable shall be an invitation to a journey *ad inferos*⁷. *Acheronta movebo*⁸.

⁷ Down to Hell. [T.N.]

⁸ *Flectere si nequeo Superos, Acheronta movebo* (If I cannot move Heaven, I will raise hell), Virgil (*Aeneid* VII). [T.N.]

IV. The Culture of the Vampyroteuthis

(a) Vampyroteuthian Thought

The farther our knowledge of mental processes progresses, the more mysterious our capacity to reflect becomes. How do we manage to control our own thoughts as if “from the outside”? How can the central nervous system programme, by itself, the processing of its own data? To try to find the “centre of reflection” within the brain seems like trying to find the systems programmer within the computer. Or it seems like trying to find the “seat of the soul” in the brain, as the Ancients tried. This is what is happening: research into brain functions has revealed that “brain maps” are inappropriate analogues of geographic maps, since mental processes such as perception, symbolic comprehension, or imagination affect exchangeable, fluid and dynamically pulsating regions of the brain at varying levels of depth. Although mental processes are “anchored” in specific places within the brain that are now better known, these still “sail” and “dive” within the brain. And in this concept of brain functions, it is not possible to conceive of reflection: there is no place remaining for it. Reflection, “spirit” or “soul”, that capacity to observe our own mental processes and direct them up to a certain point, becomes more mysterious than it was for preceding generations that ignored almost everything in relation to mental processes and were thus able to operate with notions of “spirit” and “soul” with ingenuity and dexterity.

Certainly: reflection, like all mental processes, plays a specific role in the evolution of life. Once organs of perception start to supply excessively complex and numerous data to the brain, and the brain starts to process these by means of excessively complex methods, it becomes indispensable for such processing to become programmed. Reflection is necessary for the survival of super-complex organisms. Like in the case of man and Vampyroteuthis. However, to biologize thus the mystery of reflection is not to dissipate it. It is necessary to accept it.

Vampyroteuthis reflects, and given his complexity, if he did not reflect he would not have survived. Well, he who says reflection says philosophy. So much so, that to wish to intuit vampyroteuthian existence implies a wish to decipher his philosophy. But there we stumble across a curious difficulty. Although reflection and philosophy are synonyms from a biological perspective (they are the capacity to control mental processes), they are not synonyms from the perspective of human history. The capacity to reflect has articulated itself in several successive and simultaneous philosophies that are very different from each other. In man, the capacity to reflect is like an innate base for the elaboration of acquired philosophies, a “natural” base for the cultural phenomenon of philosophy. In the attempt to capture vampyroteuthian philosophy, we cannot compare it to a human philosophy “*tout court*”, but to one of the culturally elaborated philosophies. Greek philosophy offers itself up for comparison as the foundation of Western philosophy.

For the West, “to reflect” is a process that controls the relation between lived appearances and the faculty of reason that processes them. Its two key terms are “appearance” (*phainomenon*) and “reason” (*nous*). Appearances must be “operated” on because they deceive. Reason is the operating knife that cuts appearances into defined and workable rations. This Greek vision of the relation between appearance and reason is not “originally” Greek, but “specifically” human. The first tool produced by man at the very instant of becoming man was the stone knife. Human reason produces knives because it works like a knife, and it works like a knife because it produces knives.

Vampyroteuthis doesn’t produce knives because he doesn’t need them. His bioluminescent organs cut up the world when emitting rays of light. It is true that both men and Vampyroteuthis feel the outline of objects in order to define them. But the purpose of this rational gesture is not the same in both cases. Man feels the outline of objects that appear in order to control with his hands what has appeared in front of his eyes. He does not trust

his eyes. Afterwards, man peels off the outlines that were felt, as if they were the rinds of objects. What he then has in his hands are “empty concepts”. These concepts, “models”, man stores in his memory to use them as traps in which he will grasp new objects, as yet unfelt. In this way there emerges a back-and-forth between object and model, between appearance and concept, to such end that a situation emerges in which no object will be perceived that does not have at least a slightly appropriate concept in human memory. Human reflection, their philosophy, is precisely this control of the back-and-forth between appearance and concept, between “problem” and “model”.

The purpose of vampyroteuthian touch is the Other. He touches the darkness with the aim of directing his light rays at a particular region of the world. He conceives of objects in order to make them appear. Appearance is the consequence of a deliberate act. What is inconceivable does not appear. It is reason, therefore, that makes the world appear to him. Because reason is sexual: tentacles are the carriers of penis and clitoris. Every concept is either masculine or feminine. Every concept is sexually exciting. Every stone touched on the ocean floor excites the genital apparatus: Vampyroteuthis conceives passionately. When the male handles the female, he conceives of feminine concepts in a masculine way. During coitus, masculine and feminine concepts fuse orgiastically. During coitus, “man comes to know woman” (to resort to biblical terminology), and woman to know man. That is: during coitus masculine and feminine concepts control themselves mutually and synthesise themselves. That is vampyroteuthian reflection. The key term of his philosophy is “sex”.

For Vampyroteuthis, sex is the foundation of the world of appearances and it impregnates all appearances. Sex is “public”. Vampyroteuthian philosophy is, before all else, a critique of sex. His *Organon*, the rules of his reflection, are the rules of sex. His language’s syntax, the play of colours over his skin, is the logic of sex. Should Vampyroteuthis achieve an abstraction of the “content” of thought in the course of his reflection, he will have

elaborated the structure of “pure sex”. Which is *ipso facto* the structure of “reality”. That is why vampyroteuthian reflection will have to deal with sex before all else, and will have to repress all the rest. Just like human reflection will have to deal with appearances and repress everything else, and above all, sex. However, vampyroteuthian reflection will not be able to repress everything else indefinitely. It will have to deal with other problems. And man cannot escape reflection about sex, just like Vampyroteuthian philosophy will not be able to avoid “development”.

Therefore this implies that there must be a “history of philosophy” for Vampyroteuthis, and that Vampyroteuthis ought to be a “historical being”, a being that produces culture. In reality, this conclusion is already built into the premise that Vampyroteuthis is a being that reflects. Because “reflection” does not only mean having control of data processing, but also having just as much control of data storage: it means systematising memory, cataloguing disposable information, as well as critiquing stored information. And “history” is precisely the storage and triage of acquired information. Every reflection produces history. But we men have a certain difficulty in conceiving of “history” as a process of storing and sorting acquired information only in human memory. That is because we men store a great part of the acquired information in objects such as books, paintings, buildings and tools. And it is such objects that prove to us our human historicity by allowing us to reconstitute a “past history”. We men have difficulty to conceive of “history” in the absence of these objects, of this “objective culture”. And as Vampyroteuthis does not produce such informed objects, as he does not produce “culture” in this sense of the term, we have difficulty admitting his historicity.

Vampyroteuthis obliges us to rethink not only our concept of history but also our own historicity. His behaviour suggests that his historical engagement is the storage of acquired data directly in the nervous systems of other members of the species, and that the method of this storage is the transmission of acquired data by one member of the species to others. We do not have a model

for this dialogical historicity, which does not pass through the mediation of objects. We do not have a model for a history without objective culture. But Vampyroteuthis offers us the opportunity to elaborate such a model. He allows us to contemplate human history from his point of view, and to do a vampyroteuthian critique of human history.

Homo sapiens is an erect mammal. His hands no longer serve locomotion, as they do for other vertebrates. His eyes perceive reflected solar rays, as do the eyes of other vertebrates that live on dry land. The information thus gathered is transmitted to the hands in the case of humans. The hands move according to this information, and as they move they modify the objects around them. So much so that they imprint the information received by the eyes onto the objects in the world. And these objects modified by the hands are themselves also perceived by the eyes, which transmit this information once again to the hands so that they will move. But it is not a case of a closed circuit of information that passes from the objective world through the human organism and then back to the objective world. The human organism is a complex system. Information received by the organism is processed in its nervous system and is reflected by man: "recoded". Information received by the hands is not identical to information received by the eyes. It is "new information". Human hands imprint new information onto objects. And this information is renewed progressively. This is human historicity.

In reality, it is a complex act of mirroring between the objective world surrounding man and the human organism that processes the light rays reflected by the objective world: a complex "feedback" loop. Thanks to this feedback the objective world (human culture) and man himself (human consciousness) are continuously modified. But what surprises the vampyroteuthian critic in this complex process is the fact that in all of this it is the human digestive apparatus that motivates this "feedback": that human history has economy as its infrastructure, and that the fundamental reason for this modification of the

world by man, and of the consequent modification of man, is his stomach. Should *Vampyroteuthis* analyse objects informed by man, he will find that sex had a very small role in the elaboration of the stored information. And should he analyse human behaviour, he will find that man's sexual behaviour hardly changes over the course of human history. How can such an anomaly be explained, this predominance of digestion over sex? It can be explained by the fact that the human male is slightly larger than the human female. The male repressed the female during a considerable part of human history. This repression caused in the male a constant dread of a female revolt and with this he repressed the female dimension of the world. Thus he repressed the sexual dimension of the world and concentrated his reflection on the digestive apparatus. This lends human history its pathological character: human history is the history of a specifically human neurosis.

However, this diversion of historical intention from sex to stomach is not the only thing that characterises human history. Man inhabits dry land, which is a "habitat" bathed not by water but by a gas called "air", which is an acoustic conductor like water, although a weaker conductor. Man's respiratory organs have developed the capacity to make air vibrate in a specific manner controlled by the brain, and these vibrations have been codified so that man is able to transmit information via sound vibrations. *Vampyroteuthis* does this via skin colouration. In theory, therefore, man would be capable of intersubjective communication, or in other words, true history. However, man is hindered from elaborating a true dialogical history by the presence of numerous objects that litter the Earth's surface and which are obstacles to intersubjective communication. Man finds himself compelled to transform such obstacles into communication channels, to modify them. His history is in large part this modification of objects. And this diverts human attention from others to objects. The purpose of human history is no longer to inform others with acquired

information, but to inform objects. This is another pathological feature of human history.

A curious consequence of this pathological diversion is the fact that human history is objectively verifiable. Whoever analyses objects informed by men is able to reconstruct human history. This facilitates, without a doubt, the work of the vampyroteuthian critic of human history. But precisely for being objectively verifiable in this way, human history is not true history. Just like the history of ants is not true as evidenced only by anthills. Human history is missing a characteristic of true history, which is the controlled storage of acquired data in the memory of the participants in the process. A contemplation of human history suggests that Vampyroteuthis is the only historical being on Earth.

This vampyroteuthian critique of human culture allows us then to pose the question of an alternative culture: Could there be another type of culture? Could there be a vampyroteuthian culture? And if so, could such a culture be decipherable by us humans? We must admit that Vampyroteuthis does not produce objects, with the exception of a sepia cloud that he models. In this sense, he does not produce culture. On the other hand, we must admit that Vampyroteuthis contracts particular glands to secrete particular fluids and that these fluids are the carriers of messages. Could it be that he produces history with such fluids? Could it be that his glandular contractions are his "*Res Gestae*"? And that vampyroteuthian culture is composed of fluids rapidly dissolving in water, and of messages contained in the fluids rapidly absorbed by receiving memories?

Let us consider the chromatophores, the glands that secrete the ink which colours his skin. Their function in more primitive species is sexual: the skin changes colour to attract a mate. The glands secrete according to impulses from processes in the organism's interior. They express a specific interiority. They articulate changes in the internal disposition of Vampyroteuthis. Every gland is individually controlled by the brain and can be contracted on its own or in synchrony with others. Vampyroteuthis deliberates skin

colouration in its smallest details. This colouration is codified: the vampyroteuthian observer may decipher its meaning, the “intention” in the change of skin colour. It is a language with a complex syntax and lexicon.

Another culture-forming gland, more difficult to interpret, is the one that secretes a gelatinous mass. This gelatine pervades the organism and turns it transparent to the light rays emitted by other organisms. Its function in more primitive species is protection: the animal becomes invisible to aggressors. As for Vampyroteuthis, no one attacks him: he is the lord of his ecosystem. It seems that in his case, the gland serves to support the code of skin colouration. Whilst the skin emits messages, the organism becomes invisible. Vampyroteuthis transforms himself into an emitting surface and abstracts himself from the message. This is a method of abstraction hardly graspable by us humans.

Another gland, one that secretes saliva, is found on the mouth. This venomous saliva paralyses all life around it without killing it. Its biological function is to facilitate the capture and digestion of prey. But its cultural function is another. Thanks to this paralysing method Vampyroteuthis freezes, defines and delimits objects that precipitate towards him, so that he can digest them mentally. The saliva prepares the objects to be processed as information. The gland’s function is logical, ontological and epistemological, as is the function of human fingers, with the difference that the defining gland is not deadly, as our fingers are. Our explorations grasp dead phenomena, but his grasp paralysed phenomena.

The *diverticulum*, which secretes sepia clouds, serves in more primitive species as a defence mechanism. The animal emits a cloud, models it to copy its own outlines and escapes. The aggressor attacks the cloud and the animal saves itself. In Vampyroteuthis this function is different. In more primitive species it has been observed that the cloud is manipulated not only to copy the outlines of the animal but also to assume other forms. Vampyroteuthis does not limit himself only to producing self-portraits. Clouds that are manipulated by him assume

a variety of forms and serve as support for a variety of messages. And these messages are no longer aimed at aggressors, as is the case in more primitive species, but are aimed at other Vampyroteuthes. Sepia clouds are media for intersubjective communication. They are extremely plastic, ephemeral and fluid media, therefore easily graspable and of highly dubious and connotative interpretation. But one thing is certain: the *diverticulum's* original function is to mislead the enemy. It is a stratagem. This misleading, lying, artificial and cunning character is preserved in the *diverticulum's* cultural function assumed in Vampyroteuthis. Messages emitted by Vampyroteuthis through the medium of sepia are lies.

All of these glands, and others still, are emitters of coded messages, messages that transmit acquired information to others so that they may store them in their memories and transmit them to yet others. Glands are the media of vampyroteuthian communication, the carries of vampyroteuthian history. These fluids, ephemeral and easily soluble in water, complete vampyroteuthian culture. Certainly: we do not know how to decode the messages that these fluids carry, except at a biological level, the most primitive one. It is as if in human language we were only able to decode the cries of pain and heat. Nevertheless, we know that the messages can be very abstract (gelatinous glands), very complex (skin colouration) and "artistic", that is, misleading and highly connotative (sepia). This allows us to grasp the climate of vampyroteuthian culture, if not its meaning.

It is a conspiratorial climate, a climate of ill-intentioned secrets. To be sure: our own culture is also bathed in such a climate. We also codify our messages so that they may be grasped only by those who possess the key. But there is a difference in climate. We codify in such a way that the receiver may find the key. Vampyroteuthis codifies and hides the key just as the senders of secret messages do. The vampyroteuthian receiver has to break the code just like counter-espionage services do. Vampyroteuthian emissions are enigmas. Vampyroteuthis seeks to mislead his mates. He uses highly connotative,

ephemeral fluids so that his mates cannot critique the messages. He seeks to seduce and violate his mates so that these may store the information without critique. Vampyroteuthian culture is a collection of artifices, strategies and “demagogies”. It is a conspiracy of all against all. It is a culture of the “as if”, a culture of theatrical representation, of lies.

Here are the dynamics of this culture: Vampyroteuthis collects information by means of his tentacles and bioluminescent organs. He paralyses this information by means of his saliva in order to transform it into workable “bits”. His nervous system will codify this information; it will simbolize it. This codification is done in function of emitting glands. Once codified into colours, lights, gelatine or clouds, the information will be emitted. And this emission is received by other Vampyroteuthes by means of their tentacles and bioluminescent organs. Through this process, acquired information is stored in the memory of the species. This is vampyroteuthian history. And the collection of emissions supported by the various secretions is vampyroteuthian culture.

The conspiratorial character of this culture may be formalised. Human codes oscillate between two extremes. At one extreme there are denotative codes that allow for only one “reading”. Example: mathematical and symbolic logic codes. At the other extreme there are the connotative codes, which allow for a whole gamut of “readings”. Example: artistic codes. In his communication, man deliberates whether he is going to resort to more denotative or more connotative codes. Vampyroteuthian codes, on the other hand, are surreptitiously denotative. They allow for only one “reading”, but not because they are authentically denotative (that is, that every symbol possesses only one meaning), but because they impose themselves onto the receiver by means of a particular stratagem. They are denotative, not like symbolic logic, but like the televised code. The difference is that human communication seeks correct deciphering and vampyroteuthian communication seeks erroneous

deciphering. Theoretically, that is, because there is also vampyroteuthian communication within human culture.

As for the “semantic dimension” of vampyroteuthian culture, we do not know anything about it. We do not know “what it is about” within Vampyroteuthes’ dialogue, only that it means, among other things, to seduce the Other into coitus or into being devoured. We only know the biological level of vampyroteuthian culture. Therefore this imposes on us a biologically-biased attitude towards this culture. This is a Darwinian attitude. What is the function of culture in the survival of the vampyroteuthian species? As if we asked: what is the function of culture in the survival of the human species? In the vampyroteuthian case, the answer is this: vampyroteuthian culture serves to mislead the other species and therefore to preserve the vampyroteuthian species. It serves to mislead and seduce mates into coitus and therefore to propagate the vampyroteuthian species. And it serves to mislead all other Vampyroteuthes and so to keep the individual Vampyroteuthis alive. Without a doubt: a comparable “explanation” can be equally imagined in the case of human culture. Such “explanations” can be valid, but are impertinent and undignified because they reduce cultural behaviour to the level of socio-biology. They undervalue and do not grasp the existential motivation behind human and vampyroteuthian cultural engagement. They animalise both humans and Vampyroteuthes.

However, we do possess a model similar to the Darwinian that does allow a less repugnant interpretation of culture: the Schopenhaurian model. According to this model, vampyroteuthian culture would be a “representation” that masks the violent will of this ferocious and murderous creature. A theatrical and musical “representation”, a symphony that consists of sets of colours, lights, forms, embraces and probably extremely varied sounds. An “artistic culture” in the broadest sense of the term. This “explanation” of vampyroteuthian culture allows us to intuit vampyroteuthian cultural behaviour from its own point of view.

Let us imagine how participation in such a culture is experienced. As we attempt to do this, we are taken over by vertigo. This culture surrounds its participants with its seductive gestures, its caresses, its embraces, its lights, colours and sounds, and penetrates through their pores. Vampyroteuthis swims in his culture, he licks it, revels in it and soaks in it. Culture leads him to orgasm. Not only to a physiological orgasm, but an orgasm on every existential level, above all at the level of thought. The organism (and not survival) is the objective of culture: “happiness”. How pale and insipid is human culture compared to this culture. But of course: Vampyroteuthis is capable of cultural critique just as much as man. He has his Frankfurts. It is there that Vampyroteuthis will discover that the purpose of his culture is to help him forget, through orgasm, that he will die. The purpose of his culture is to make him forget death, as is the purpose of human culture. With one difference: human culture seeks to repress the consciousness of death through the production of objects, through sexual repression. Vampyroteuthian culture seeks to repress the consciousness of death through sexual excitement, and through the repression of suicidal and cannibalistic tendencies.

Thus we may try to reconstitute how Vampyroteuthis thinks, or his “*forma mentis*”. Vampyroteuthis thinks in function of the orgasm, and when he reflects he seeks to unveil the orgasm as a masking of death. He seeks to discover the lie that hides in the orgasm. That is why his philosophy is unlike human philosophy. Our philosophy seeks to discover the truth behind fallacy, his seeks the truth behind lies. They are not the same “truths”. However, both reflections negate existence, they “reflect” on existence and about existence, they are mirrors, each in their own way and in opposite directions. In the infernal abysses there is an opposite philosophy to ours, but which is still a philosophy: an affirmation of existential dignity in spite of the conditions within which it was thrown into the world. Hell has

dignity, although one that is opposite to ours: an up-side-down dignity.

(b) Vampyroteuthian Social Life

The entire evolution of life may be seen as an increasing tendency towards socialisation. Thus, it will reveal plateaus. The Protozoa are to be found on the first plateau living as individual and isolated cells. The Metazoa are to be found on the next plateau as cellular societies, where although cells continue to feed and propagate individually, they no longer live isolated but in function of a society. However, the passage from the first to the second plateau is neither clear nor simple: life has hesitated before taking this tiring step, and the proof of this hesitation are the Mesozoa and the Parazoa. They are cellular colonies, "free associations" in which cells conserve their individuality. If the Sponge were able to argue, it would say that the Metazoa represent "collectivist" decadence, since in them the ontological dignity of the cell is sacrificed.

The Eumetazoa are "organisms" and the next evolutionary plateau belongs to them. Societies of organs, that in turn are societies of tissues, that in turn are cellular societies. The price that these multi-level cellular societies pay for their complex socialisation is death. The social functions of cells, tissues and organs are contradictory and complimentary, which makes the "government" of such an organism a process of constant balance and acrobatics. When the equilibrium is broken, the organism dies. This is the evolutionary plateau occupied by man and Vampyroteuthis. However, we are both separately engaged to overcome this plateau, to build societies of organisms.

Another branch of evolution has achieved this success, above all the Hymenoptera, the most highly-evolved of the insects. They form societies (such as beehives and anthills) within which the individual organism has genetically programmed social functions. In face of this new evolutionary plateau we tend to argue as though we were sponges: the ants represent "collectivist" decadence, since in them the ontological dignity of the organism is sacrificed. Here is our argument: Insects are

organisms of high cerebralisation in relation to their bodies. But insects are organisms that suffer from a defect in construction that prevents them from reaching a convenient size for such incredibly high cerebralisation. The defect is the exoskeleton. To be able to grow, they have to shed this “armour” periodically. In the interim, they are soft and unprotected animals. Had they reached a size comparable to ours, gravity would have crushed them in the armour-less interval. Insects are condemned to be small, with incredibly small brains. Evolution seeks to compensate for this defect in construction through the elaboration of super-organisms. Anthills are systems of comparable size to the human organism, with a cerebralisation superior to the human. However, the price paid by evolution is the loss of individual “freedom”, since for us “individual” is synonymous with organism.

At the level of our own evolutionary plateau, the tendency towards socialisation happens in a more “dignified” way (following our argument) in the form of “social instincts” that preserve the dignity of the individual within society. For example, the social behaviour of mammals that form herds. As for us, we tend to overcome these social instincts in order to deliberate “free” societies, societies that are creative syntheses of the individual who is conscious of his dignity and of the society built to function for the benefit of its members.

Such anthropocentric chauvinism in relation to the evolutionary tendency towards socialisation is supported only thanks to a particular model: the one in which evolution is an obstacle course won by whoever arrives first, and man always arrives first. This model is not appropriate. The evolutionary game is a game of chance in which no one wins, because everyone dies. A more appropriate evolutionary model is this: the world as a whole tends towards increasingly balanced situations that are increasingly “probable”. It tends towards the transformation of every type of energy into heat, towards “heat death”. But in the course of this tendency there occurs, by chance, not so probable situations and highly improbable situations. These occurrences form an epicycle

over and above the general tendency of the world towards entropy, and one of these epicycles is the evolution of life. In this epicycle, increasingly improbable situations form by chance: particles form atoms; atoms form molecules; molecules form polymers; polymers form cells; cells form tissues; tissues form organs; organs form organisms and organisms form societies. The evolutionary epicycle arose from the entropic tendency at a particular moment, and shall flow back into it at another moment. Given the second law of thermodynamics, evolution shall disintegrate once again "by necessity". But that is not all. Every improbable individual situation shall, by the same "necessity", become more probable again: atoms will disintegrate, molecules will decompose, polymers will dissolve, cells will degenerate, tissues will rip, organs will disorganise, organisms will die and societies will decay. Every system tends towards chaos. It is with this model that we are obliged to try and grasp the evolutionary tendency towards increasing socialisation.

What occurs is this: every time that an improbable situation arises, there emerges two paths in the game of chance, two "strategies". One towards an even more improbable situation, and another back to chaos. When the atoms arise by chance, there also arises a path towards the molecule, and another towards the disintegration of the atom. Both will be followed by the blind game of chance. At the instant that the atom emerges, the situation is indecisive: both paths are possible. When the mammalian organism arises by chance, there arise also the paths towards mammalian society and death. Both are followed by the blind game of chance. But at the moment that the mammalian organism emerges, the mammalian society is only a possibility. That is why from the point of view of a mammal that reflects, from the human point of view, this possibility of socialisation is not experienced as "possible chance" but as "realisable virtuality".

An ant that reflects sees a different situation. Its socialisation is not virtuality, but fact. And a fact that emerged by chance. For an ant that speculates, the problem of socialisation poses itself in the same way that

the problem of how the stomach functions within the context of the organism poses itself to man: as a physiological problem. The “social question” is the genetically programmed question of functionalism. There probably is another question for the ant that reflects: how to integrate the behaviour of several anthills. It is at this level, which is unreachable for us, that the problem of freedom and dignity poses itself to an ant. Whoever takes an anthill as a model for human society must take into consideration that he is trying to transform politics and ethics into physiology. Politics and ethics, that is, the problems of decision that are valid only at the intermediate stage between the plateaus, in which the game of chance still has not played its next move.

If we desire models for human socialisation based on extra-human behaviour, we should seek them not with insects, but with organisms that occupy the same corresponding plateau as our own; above all with the mammals that represent the same evolutionary branch from which we emerged. We can observe, for example, how with wolves or chimpanzees there arise intra-specific tensions that evoke our own political and ethical problems (love, hate, cooperation, competition) and how therefore genetically programmed behaviour gradually transforms into deliberate behaviour. An exceptionally revealing behavioural case is the canine one, since dogs live in human environments and copy human behaviour. But there is a problem in every model of this type: the other mammals, as close as they may be to us, do not reflect, do not “exist”. They are incapable of controlling their behaviour according to human methods. That is why their social behaviour lacks a political and ethical dimension, so to speak. That is the danger of all socio-biology. It either humanises animal behaviour, or even more dangerously, it animalises human behaviour. An example of this danger is Lorentz, who collects his models from geese, which are products of a different evolutionary branch quite divergent from ours.

The most appropriate model to grasp our own socialisation would be a model taken from the social

behaviour of an organism that reflects, and that finds itself on an evolutionary plateau correspondent to our own, such as Vampyroteuthis. This organism should suffer from the same “insuperable” dialectic between self-affirmation and social integration, between “freedom” and “engagement”, from which we suffer. This organism should suffer from a “bad conscience” like we do, because it must have, like us, “values”. If we could observe the social behaviour of Vampyroteuthis, we would have a political model that would not be socio-biological, but ethical. However, we cannot observe this behaviour, since he hides in the depths of the night.

Nevertheless, we make use of fragments of information that allow us to reconstruct the main outlines of this behaviour. We know that Vampyroteuthis is monogamous, and that the male and female execute complex and protracted sexual rituals. Equally, that there is intra-specific highly refined communication, and that the parents occupy themselves intensively with the offspring until these have matured. We also know that the offspring form hierarchically organised societies reminiscent of the egg clusters laid by the mother, and that Vampyroteuthis tends towards cannibalism as well as towards suicide. This is surely fragmentary information, but also very revealing information about the foundations of this behaviour.

The nucleus of the vampyroteuthian family (analogue to the human family) is the community of identical siblings born from the same cluster of eggs: a community in a genetically programmed hierarchy. Every individual Vampyroteuthis occupies a place in the society of identical siblings that is imposed from birth. He is born “unequal”. This is the fundamental fact of his social existence, one of the conditions of being Vampyroteuthis. All of the information acquired throughout his life must be stored against this backdrop. His inequality shapes the basis of all his engagement. “All Vampyroteuthes are born unequal and shall continue to be until death”. It is against this “natural” determination that he must direct his entire attempt at self-assertion. And this inequality goes hand-in-

hand with his identical fraternity. By being an identical sibling, Vampyreuthis is unequal, and by being unequal, he is identical: the dialectic of “equality/fraternity”.

To resort to the triple-cry “freedom, equality and fraternity” seems inescapable. Fraternity is imposed genetically on Vampyreuthis, as it is on man, but more radically imposed: in the form of identical siblings. But equality, which in the case of humans is not genetically programmed (even though we may deny it), is programmed into Vampyreuthis, although in reverse. Vampyreuthis is programmed for inequality. If we define “freedom” as the emancipation from the genetic programme, here is how the dialectics of freedom presents itself: in the case of humans, freedom is the emancipation from fraternity (from “social instincts”) in favour of equality and in favour of self-assertion, therefore a dialectic between equality and self-assertion. In the case of Vampyreuthis, freedom is the emancipation from identical siblings and inequalities (from “social instincts”) in favour of the assertion of the self: the dialectic between genetic information and acquired information. We men become free when we build societies that allow a balance between equality and self-assertion. Vampyreuthes become free when they manage to break the bonds that tie them to their identical siblings and that make them unequal to each other. That is why, for men, “politics” is an engagement in favour of this social model. And for Vampyreuthis, “politics” is an engagement against every type of society. When Vampyreuthis engages himself, he becomes an anarchist.

If we seek to intuit Vampyreuthis’ socio-political situation, we shall observe the accumulated ferocious and diabolical violence that supports it. To be sure: there is a deep similarity between the vampyreuthian and human political situations. We are both engaged against the natural condition, the animal condition, which determines us both. Man, just like Vampyreuthis, engages against his fraternity, against the genetically programmed social structures such as the family, race, clan and nation, to transform these structures into culturally deliberated ones.

And if man abandons himself to these imposed structures, and if he comes to ideologically glorify them, he betrays, as well as Vampyroteuthis, his dignity as free existence. But this deep similarity supports a decisive difference. In man, the “social instincts”, the genetically programmed social structures, are relatively weak. If we analyse these social structures, supposedly “natural” (family, nation, etc.), we shall observe how in reality they are culturally determined. In such a way that human engagement is driven more against structures that have been developed throughout history and less against innate structures. However, in Vampyroteuthis the genetically programmed social structures are relatively stronger. He is a being that “recognises himself in the Other” more instinctively than man, in such a way that his engagement is driven more against his own “nature” and less against his culture. To him, “politics” is more clearly the “overcoming of animal nature” than it is in the case of humans, hence the cannibalistic and suicidal violence of his engagement. The political struggle, for us, is above all the struggle against established structures in favour of structures yet to be deliberated. For him, the political struggle is above all the struggle of all against all, and the struggle of self against self, that aims to destroy all structures. Permanent revolution. Fratricidal civil war. Politics, for us, is engagement in favour of a particular “*polis*”. For him it is engagement against every form of “*polis*”.

Vampyroteuthis is better programmed for social behaviour than man. Look at his genetically programmed monogamy, his genetically programmed care for the offspring and his genetically programmed structure of groups of identical siblings. He is more socially developed than man. His “social unconscious” is more articulated than the human one. He recognises himself more spontaneously in the Other than man. That is why the dialectic of freedom presents itself to him in a different form. It presents itself as a negation of the social programme, as an emancipation from the obligation to recognise himself in the Other. Freedom imposes itself as the negation of animal nature. Vampyroteuthis recognises

himself in the Other animalistically, bestially. His love is savage. Freedom is having overcome this bestial love for the sake of deliberate reflection. That is why for Vampyroteuthis “society” is a natural category, and sociology is a discipline of the natural sciences. Freedom is to be able to manipulate society through the knowledge of the laws of nature. To overcome society by disciplined reflection. Politics is technique. Technique against programmed love. Politics is the technique to overcome vampyroteuthian animal nature in order to emancipate Vampyroteuthis from society.

We could conclude that the motive for vampyroteuthian engagement is his spite for the Other. That freedom, for him, is being able to devour the Other. And that this is what distinguishes vampyroteuthian social behaviour from our own. Or that when we men kill our brother, it is to build a more just society, and that when he embraces his brother, it is to eat him. Or even that when we hate, it is because we want to love, and that when he loves it is because he wants to hate, neither of us ever succeeding. But such a conclusion would be too hasty. Because love and hate do not mean the same attitude in both cases. Love is anti-natural in man. When a man loves a woman, it is not about a symbiotic biological relation that seeks procreation; it is the anti-natural, suicidal relation by which the man is prepared to sacrifice himself for the loved woman. Human friendship is not the cooperation between two individuals in view of a particular task, but the readiness of an individual to allow another to alter him. If man loves, it is because he has overcome his natural condition, and in the case of humans, love is a “spiritual thing”. Vampyroteuthis, on the contrary, is a “naturally loving” being. The orgiastic love between the sexes, the love for the offspring, and the love between identical siblings is genetically programmed. If Vampyroteuthis loves, it is because he is relapsing into his animalistic condition. It is hate that is a “spiritual thing” in him.

That is why, as we discover spiteful gestures in man (competition, war, the repression of man by man or of

woman by man), we discover the “sublimated” animal nature in humans. And as we discover loving gestures in Vampyroteuthis (fidelity, friendship, cooperation, caresses), we discover the un-sublimated animal nature in Vampyroteuthis. If we observe loving gestures in man (Christianity, Socialism), we observe that man manages precariously to overcome his animal nature. And if we observe spiteful gestures in Vampyroteuthis (cannibalism, suicide, the communication of lies), we are observing that Vampyroteuthis too can precariously overcome his animal nature. The spirit manifests itself in man through loving gestures and in Vampyroteuthis through spiteful gestures. The overcoming of hate motivates human culture and the overcoming of love motivates vampyroteuthian culture, but both aim for victory of the spirit against nature.

What has just been described is Hell, in which “spirit” becomes synonymous with “sin”. But this is not what horrifies us. The horror in all this is that Vampyroteuthis’ social behaviour is not opposite to ours. On the contrary: we recognise in the vampyroteuthian motives and social gestures our own most noble motives and gestures. As we contemplate vampyroteuthian social behaviour, we recognise that his values are at the very centre of our own behaviour, that Vampyroteuthis hides at the bottom of our own political thought, and that human ethic is at its very centre vampyroteuthian. And if we analyse our own models, be they political or para-political, we will end up unearthing Vampyroteuthis. Example: socio-biology.

Darwin understands evolution as a struggle for the survival of the species, and for the survival of the individual within the species. “Dialectic of freedom”. This is the model of Vampyroteuthis. Life appears as a cannibalistic and suicidal monster that devours its own tentacles. Each living being devours another living being, to be devoured by yet another living being. Cannibalism is the very mechanism of evolution, of “progress”. Fratricide is the method by which the spirit imposes itself over nature. Because the spirit is the best weapon in such a struggle of all against all. Hence, such spiteful model is the

very model of freedom, and a product of the thought responsible for liberalism. And as for what was said in reference to the Darwinian model, it is also valid for every socio-political human model. At the bottom of all of them resides Vampyroteuthis, repressed, for sure, but effective.

This is because Vampyroteuthis is not the opposite of man but the repressed side of man, just as man is the repressed side of Vampyroteuthis. Love and hate are not opposite to each other: there is a hateful side to every love and a loving side to every hate, the two are not separable. The “spirit” is hateful love and loving hate. In Vampyroteuthis, in his reflection and in his social behaviour, the hateful side of the spirit is articulated, but poorly so, because the loving side does not allow itself to be completely repressed. In human reflection and social behaviour, the loving side of the spirit is articulated equally as poorly because the hateful side cannot be completely repressed. In the cannibalistic and suicidal vampyroteuthian tendencies, one of the motives for all human political engagement is consciously articulated. This is the fascination that Vampyroteuthis exerts upon us: he dares to articulate Hell. But for sure: the “Hell” which he articulates is his utopia. As well as ours.

(c) Vampyroteuthian Art

Both men and Vampyroteuthes are engaged against oblivion, this fundamental tendency in nature. Both store and transmit acquired information. Both are historical beings. Although both are engaged in memory, we are not so in relation to the same type of memory; we do not even use the same methods to store data, and this is the decisive difference.

Men seek to imprint acquired information onto objects. Other men that pass by the informed objects will collect the information thus “objectified”. We trust the relative presence of the objective world, and that is why we entrust it with our acquired information. We trust that informed objects might outlive us, and after our deaths attest to our passage through the world. Therefore, humanity hopes to possess two types of information storage: one for genetic information, the egg, and one for acquired information, objective culture (books, buildings, paintings). Thanks to these two types of storage, humanity considers itself immortal: in the egg as a species, and in informed objects as individuals.

This human trust in the permanence of the objective world seems quite derisory from the point of view of those who, like Vampyroteuthis, inhabit a liquid environment. From this point of view, the only material for information storage that is worthy of trust is the egg. Genetic information is *aere perennius*⁹ and will not only outlive all books, buildings and paintings, but also the species itself, although in a mutated form. Long after all of the human creative oeuvre has been reduced to dust, human genetic information shall continue to be transmitted from generation to generation, although possibly by a species evolved from humans. So much so, that the problem of historical engagement is to elaborate

⁹ More lasting than bronze or brass. [T.N.]

methods that allow for acquired data to be stored in the same memory that also stores inherited data. Thus placing trust in the permanence of the species and its future development, and not in the permanence of the objective world. Certainly: such storage and transmission methods may resort to objects. However, such objects shall not be storage material, but transmission channels, “media”.

It may seem at first glance that the difference of choice between types of memories and methods is not that decisive. That it is merely a difference in emphasis. Men also consider objects as media, and when they manipulate objects they also seek to transform them from barriers into communication channels that transmit information to other men. *Vampyroteuthis* also resorts to several types of objects (colours, lights, sepia clouds), which he manipulates in order to transmit information to other *Vampyroteuthes*. The difference is only that men trust the permanence of objects more so than *Vampyroteuthes*. This minimisation of the difference, however, would be misleading. Because man is a being that seeks his immortality in objects, and that is why he expresses himself through them. *Vampyroteuthis* is a being that seeks his immortality in the Other and that is why he expresses himself in others through objects. These are two different gestures of articulation, two different manifestations of the spirit, two types of publication, two different public attitudes, two different ways of externalising intimacies, of publishing the private, of exhibiting the inhibited; two opposing attitudes in relation to the ineffable. In sum: it effectively comes down to two different types of art.

When man seeks to express a particular experience, when he seeks to make audible the inaudible and visible the invisible, he does so in function of a particular object. Within human articulation, experience and object are inseparable from each other. Everything that man experiences is experienced “for” a particular object: for marble, for a particular spoken or written language, for musical sounds, for celluloid film. And every object that man encounters on his way towards death

implicitly contains the categories that allow the articulation of particular experiences: a particular sentiment, thought, value or desire. It is not the case that man has experiences first and then seeks an appropriate object through which to express them. Hence, man experiences the world in function of a particular object: as marble sculptor, as orator or writer of Portuguese, as musician or as film producer. The objects, be they "material" or "immaterial", be they stones and bones or numbers and letters, shape all human experience.

Every object is perfidious: it resists the human attempt to inform it, and every object is perfidious in its own way. Stone breaks when hammered, bone cracks when chiselled, numbers impose their own rules on thought expressed through them, linear writing transforms the sentiment expressed through it. To inform objects is to struggle against the specific perfidy of every object. This struggle slowly reveals the resistance of objects: the structure of cotton that sags, of glass that cracks, of concrete that dries out, of the tonal scale that becomes tempered, or of the language syntax that inflects. Therefore this discovery of the structure implicit in every object is in itself also an experience that men acquire. It is such a violent experience, that not only does it provoke appropriate knowledge and techniques for specific objects, but also modifies man himself. It is therefore important to store and transmit these acquired experiences, and to do so via methods of expression proper to the object. Thus there emerges "feedback" between man and object, through which man informs the object and has experiences through it, experiences that will be used again to inform objects. Such "feedback" is the essence of human art.

The object's resistance provokes man. As if it was a voice that came from the object, calling to be informed. This is the human vocation. There are men whose vocation it is to inform stones, and others whose vocation it is to inform letters. Whoever does not discover the object of his vocation will live in frustration. The vocation, this "feedback" between man and object, is so passionately engaging that it leads man to forget his original purpose,

that of informing objects so that the information can continue to be available to other men. The object itself absorbs man's interest. In the same way that stone transforms into statue and writing into text, man is transformed into sculptor and writer and forgets that he is a man for other men. Man, with all his feelings, thoughts, values and desires realises himself in stone and in letters. All of his passions and actions become concentrated onto the object. An example of this objectification of existential interest is poetry. Language is apparently a medium for intersubjective communication, and yet the poet realises himself during the struggle against the deeply rooted rules and structures of language. No longer does he speak through language, but against it. He objectifies its intersubjectivity. The poet's vocation is to inform language.

Human art is not thus, as the well-meaning bourgeoisie would have us believe, the fabrication of "beautiful" objects. Human art is the gesture through which man imprints his experience onto the object of his vocation in order to realise himself in it, to immortalise himself in it. Every object thus informed is a "work of art", be it a mathematical equation, political institution, or symphony. Certainly: the mathematical equation transmits above all epistemological information, the political institution transmits ethical information, and the symphony transmits aesthetic information. However, the labelling of "works" as scientific, political and artistic is misleading. Because every human experience to be expressed in objects implies all three of these informative parameters. Every experience implies knowledge, value and sensation, and it does so simultaneously. To divide informed objects, "culture", according to these three labels is to ignore that man is a being that, by vocation, expresses acquired experiences onto objects. One who, by vocation, "works". And that every human work is "art": an answer to a provocation emitted by a particular object.

Objects do not provoke *Vampyroteuthis*. Objects do not divert his existential interest: he aims always towards the Other. His creative activity, through which he stores acquired experiences goes beyond objects, is

directed towards the Other. The sepia cloud does not impede his tentacles, as human fingers are impeded by stone. His chromatophores are not curtailed by the rules of skin colouration, as is human speech by linguistic rules. Tentacles and chromatophores go beyond the object. They do not “make”, they “complete”. His creation is not “made”, but “perfected”. That is why when he creates, Vampyroteuthis does not experience the perfidy of the object but the perfidy of the Other. When he articulates the ineffable, he does not struggle against the perfidy of matter, but against the perfidy of the message’s receiver. He does not want to violate objects by imposing new information onto them; in order to be informed it is the Other that has to be violated. The Other’s memory is for Vampyroteuthis the same as stone and language are for us. Vampyroteuthis is sculptor and writer working against the Other. He hammers and composes the other. Vampyroteuthis’ vocation is the Other. It is during the violation of the Other that Vampyroteuthis realises himself. It is through this struggle against the Other that he acquires new experiences. It is this struggle that fascinates him, that absorbs his interest. This “feedback” between emitter and receiver, this dialogue, is the essence of vampyroteuthian art.

Within this artistic creation we are able to distinguish between several phases. (1) Vampyroteuthis goes through a particular experience. (2) He searches in his memory for a suitable model in order to capture it. (3) He verifies the absence of such a model: the experience is as yet unuttered. (4) This arresting experience goes beyond his organism, is organised by the brain and then transmitted to the chromatophores. (5) The chromatophores transcode the experience into a “skin painting” code. (6) Such skin colouration, never seen before, provokes the curiosity of another Vampyroteuthis. (7) The emitter uses the new colouration to seduce the receiver and copulate with it. The result of this creative process is that henceforth there is a model to capture the unuttered experience, and that this model is thereafter stored in the memory of the copulating mate. The acquired

information was thus incorporated into the vampyroteuthian dialogue and will remain there forever. This is because vampyroteuthian dialogue is eternal, as eternal as the genetic information stored in the egg.

A comparable creative process occurs when *Vampyroteuthis* does not make use of the chromatophores, but uses the sepia cloud to transmit acquired information. It would be misleading to think that a “feedback” between tentacles and sepia cloud is established in such a process, like the “feedback” between marble and fingers. This is not because the cloud is plastic and ephemeral, and marble permanent and hard. It is rather because the cloud is a vampyroteuthian secretion and marble is an object that is strange to man. The cloud does not fascinate *Vampyroteuthis* like marble fascinates man, because the cloud is not strange to him. As he models the cloud *Vampyroteuthis* is fascinated, just like man as he models marble. However, *Vampyroteuthis* is fascinated by the effect that the modelled cloud will have upon another *Vampyroteuthis*. His fascination is not objective but intersubjective.

Here is what happens during the modelling of the cloud. *Vampyroteuthis* goes through a particular experience, an adventure. His genetic information programmes him to secrete sepia in such dangerous situations. The same genetic information programmes him to model the cloud in such a fashion that the danger is directed against the cloud and not against him. *Vampyroteuthis* is genetically programmed to divert the enemy’s intention. However, *Vampyroteuthis* reflects: as opposed to other less evolved octopi, he controls and re-programmes his own genetic programme in function of deliberate decisions. The experience that *Vampyroteuthis* has just gone through must be expressed in the cloud, no longer with the intention to divert a hypothetical aggressor, but to store this experience in the memory of another *Vampyroteuthis*. The cloud should not astound a hypothetical aggressor but should astound another

Vampyroteuthis with the intention of forcing him to store the experience. The cloud must *épater les bourgeois*¹⁰ so that they remember what happened. The purpose of modelling the cloud is to divert the attention of the other Vampyroteuthis away from his intention, and to direct it towards the new information. So that other Vampyroteuthes are drawn towards the cloud and devour it thinking that they are devouring the emitter of the message. Thus the new information is incorporated into the vampyroteuthian dialogue forever by the method of deliberate deception, artifice and lies. “Art”.

The vampyroteuthian creative process is the method through which new models of sensation, knowledge and value are articulated and transmitted to others who are violated by seduction or lies in order to store them. Vampyroteuthian art is a series of artifices, thanks to which the vampyroteuthian society is violated in order to accept particular models, transmitted through the intermediation of ephemeral and despised objects. That is why there is neither “pure art”, nor “pure science” or “pure politics” for Vampyroteuthis. Vampyroteuthis is always a “total artist”, that is, a being that seeks to attain immortality through the epistemological, aesthetic and ethical modelling of the Other. He seeks his immortality by means of violence exerted upon the Other. To him, science and politics are nothing but stratagems of art, nothing but traps. The aim is to inform the Other, to alter him, to impose on him particular information, knowledge, behaviour and sensations. And these are, knowledge, behaviour and sensations that have been deliberated by the emitter of the message. Vampyroteuthian art is total and totalitarian, because the raw materials are not objects but rather society. Vampyroteuthis is an artist that hammers into society to immortalise himself in it. The motive for vampyroteuthian creativity, for his search for immortality, is his spite for the Other. That is why “art” and “deceit” are synonyms.

¹⁰ To shock the bourgeois.

Certainly, the vampyroteuthian creative process differs radically from the human. It is a different gesture and has a different purpose. However, its consideration provokes two opposing reactions. On one side, our own art shall reveal in its anti-vampyroteuthian aspects a less than flattering character. On the other side, in our own art we shall discover a clear tendency towards approximating the art of Vampyroteuthis. We may summarise this reaction with the following: inasmuch as human art diverges from vampyroteuthian art, it is a confused and undisciplined enterprise, and as human art acquires self-awareness and discipline, it moves towards a convergence with the art of Vampyroteuthis.

Men, as opposed to Vampyroteuthes, have “purity”: pure art, pure science, pure social technique. However, from Vampyroteuthis’ point of view, this purity will reveal itself to be dirt: the artist is pure when his existential interest stagnates on the path towards the Other through the swamp of some dirty object (in stone, in sound, in linguistic syntax). The scientist is pure when his interest stagnates in the swamp of another dirty object (in phenomenon, in equation, in theory), and the social technician is pure when his existential interest manages to transform the Other, towards whom he drives, into an object (of economy, of sociology, of politics), and this is the dirtiest of all objects. Therefore “purity” is a consequence of distracted interest, a perversion of interest. The artistic gesture reveals itself as an embarrassing gesture, as when a chicken pecks for grain when it doesn’t know whether it should flee or attack the enemy. Human art is pure because it has forgotten its purpose, that of transmitting information to others so that they can store it.

However, men have started to become conscious of their forgetfulness. They have started to become aware that art history is a history of misunderstandings. They have started to do “communication theory”, to make the artistic gesture more conscious and disciplined. The consequence of that is the communications revolution that is now underway which will restructure all of human activity. Deep down, this revolution consists of a diversion

of the existential interest stagnated in objects back towards the Other. Our communicational structures are being fundamentally transformed, in the sense of becoming constituted by ephemeral and transient media that allow the Other to be informed without the need for objects. It is as if humanity, after a multi-millennial turn through the objective world, had now reencountered the vampyroteuthian path. This vampyroteuthisation of our art deserves a closer look.

Before the industrial revolution every creative man was a craftsman, be it a blacksmith, cobbler, painter or poet. The post-industrial distinction between craftsman and artist was nonsensical: all of these creators imprinted information onto objects, whether iron, leather, canvas or letters. The object stored the information expressed within it; it was a “work of art” and the information stored was the “value” of the work. In this way, the three concepts: information, value and artwork, were inseparable. Together they constituted “culture”. The industrial revolution destroyed this concept of “culture”. It invented a method of production that allowed information to be imprinted onto tools that imprint information onto objects. No longer blacksmith or cobbler, but now tools inform iron and leather, and the creative man is the toolmaker. It is the tool that stores the information and it is the tool that has value, and the object simply transmits the information from the tool. It is no longer a work of art, and its value becomes lower and lower. Object and value start to separate and the concept “work of art”, and therefore of work, is diluted. The most clarifying example of this rupture in the concept of “culture” is provided by the printing press, a precursor to the industrial revolution as a whole. It is in the printing press and not in the printed book that the information is stored, and the value is in the manuscript and not in the book read, which acquires a pitiful value. The writer becomes toolmaker. Society did not realise, at the time, the impact of the industrial revolution upon the creative process, because art in the restricted modern sense of the term continued to be crafted, untouched by the new methods of production

since it was relegated to ghettos called “exhibitions and museums”.

The second industrial revolution that is currently beginning constitutes a new reformulation of production methods: information is no longer stored in tools but in cybernetic programmes within apparatus that produce tools. Thus it is the programmer (the analyst and systems’ developer) and not the toolmaker that informs. The apparatus will automatically imprint information onto tools, which will in turn automatically imprint the information onto countless objects. There emerges a tsunami of cheaper and cheaper gadgets that are pitiful for being banal, ephemeral stereotypes, carriers of diluted information: “mass culture”. This is the culture of plastic pens, of pre-fabricated houses and of stereotyped political opinions. Programmed culture. Valueless culture because apparatus produce it automatically. The value and information are thus stored in the artificial memory of the apparatus. Hence this inflationary tide of devalued objects leads to a disinterest in objects. Such objects no longer fascinate. It is no longer interesting to possess these objects. These are objects of mere consumption. That is: they are used until the information imprinted onto them is worn out, at which point they are thrown into the dustbin. Society’s interest is increasingly diverted from objects towards information, which however is inaccessible to consumers. It is stored in the memory of apparatus and is transmitted, diluted, not only by the gadgets, but also and above all by the ephemeral channels of mass communication. In this way, the society of the immediate future shall be a society of information consumption, increasingly less interested in the consumption of “goods”, of objects. The interest is diverted from economy to sociology. Intersubjective society: a society of *Vampyroteuthes*.

Man was, until recently, a being that worked. To work is to imprint information onto objects, “to transform the objective world”. From now on this will be the work of apparatus. Men will no longer be workers and shall become message programmers and receivers. The

“production moral” will disappear simultaneously with the “private property moral”. A new moral shall emerge, one of elaboration and consumption of messages. Human existence will no longer realise itself in the struggle against objects, but in the struggle for preservation and transmission of acquired information. Men shall cease to be “workers” and will become “systems’ functionaries”. Total artists functioning within programmed totalitarianism. Vampyroteuthes.

The most clarifying example of this new rupture in the concept of “culture” is provided by photography, an invention that is the precursor of the second revolution now underway. The individual photograph is a pitiful object of almost no value, an ephemeral stereotype easily replaceable. The value is in the information imprinted onto the photograph and it is stored in the prototype, the “negative”. The photographic apparatus produces these prototypes automatically according to a specific programme contained within the apparatus. The photographer does not work, but rather functions within the apparatus’ programme and re-programmes the apparatus. The purpose of the photographer is not to produce photographs, but to transmit information through photographs. What fascinates the photographer is not the photographic paper, the object, but the information to be transmitted. The photographic paper is for the photographer what the skin is for Vampyroteuthis: a medium for colourful messages.

Will then the vision of vampyroteuthian art necessarily be the vision of our own immediate future? Will the society of the future necessarily be a society of hatred, lies and the violation of the Other through seduction and deception? There are reasons to state that such a future is probable but not inevitable. The difference between vampyroteuthian art and human art of the future is this: although we may come to despise the objective world as much as Vampyroteuthis despises it, although this world may become to us a mere collection of ephemeral communication channels just as it is for him, we emerge, as opposed to him, from a struggle against

objects that has taken tens of thousands of years. This struggle and the experiences acquired during it are stored in our memory but not in his. We have engaged in this struggle against objects in cooperation with all other men, and have been able to emerge victorious only due to this cooperation. We still have stored in our memories the fact that initially, in the Palaeolithic Age, all men were constantly threatened by the objective world and were therefore obliged to unite against this world. In such a way that for us men, the Other is not merely an adversary to be violated and informed, but also an ally who creates information together with us. In fact, this memory of the primordial alliance slowly falls into oblivion under the impact of mass culture. However, this memory is still present and can help prevent us from transforming ourselves into heirs and transmitters of programmed information.

We can observe in *Vampyreuthis* that information programming can dismiss the need for apparatus. The organism may function as an apparatus. Apparatus functionalism may become “integrated”. The apparatus-like behaviour may “overcome the apparatus”. There could emerge a totalitarianism of integrated apparatus, therefore invisible and imperceptible. Just like the gelatinous mass of *Vampyreuthis*. The contemplation of vampyreuteuthian art prevents us therefore from glorifying the total work of art, the artificial, artifice and deception, so that we shall avoid every form of romanticism, because *Vampyreuthis* illustrates the essence of romanticism: Hell.

V. The Emergence of the Vampyroteuthis

Recently, three examples of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* were fished out of the South China Sea. That is not enough. Further explorations of the deep are necessary. Of the oceanic depths, just as much as the depths that are hidden within us. These abysses undoubtedly hide more astonishing secrets than the ones discovered in the cosmos. Without a doubt: such explorations are constantly happening and are equipped with ever more refined instruments. However, it is necessary to coordinate these exploratory expeditions. At the current stage of our knowledge of these depths, there begins to emerge a suspicion that all expeditions regardless of their origin (oceanography, genetics, neurophysiology, psychology, nuclear physics or astronomy) have a tendency to converge in the depths that they explore. There begins to emerge a suspicion that the starting points for these expeditions are chosen according to "superficial" criteria that do not apply at the depths. So that down there, all of our categories from the surface become confused. In such a way that every expedition regardless of its "specialisation" will ultimately come up against *Vampyroteuthis*.

However, such expeditions find themselves hindered by a curious difficulty. The world in which we live has the symmetry of diametrically opposed mirrors. Everything within this world reflects. This symmetry is a consequence of the being-in-the-world of humans. Man reflects himself in the world, and the world in man, and this back-and-forth of opposite reflections is human reality proper. This implies not only that the "external" abysses reflect the "internal" abysses, and vice-versa, but also just as much that the abysses reflect the explorer and the explorer the abysses. In such a way that not only all expeditions, regardless of where they come from, will ultimately come up against *Vampyroteuthis*, but equally that they will ultimately come up against each other. They will find *Vampyroteuthis* and will find themselves in

Vampyroteuthis. That is because he inhabits all of our depths and we inhabit his. And this encounter of oneself at the other end of the world is the ultimate purpose of all human explorations. Because, “at bottom”, man’s only theme, is man.

All explorations will end up encountering one another and encountering themselves, but to say this is a banality reminiscent of alchemy. What is less banal is that this ultimate encounter will not take place in some “nucleus of the real” or in some “fifth element” but through mirrors. Or in other words, that the journey to the deep is not a journey “back to mother” but the journey of Alice to Wonderland, a journey through the mirror. That is less banal because it is a recent discovery. The difference between the alchemist’s journey and current explorations is that the first seeks the philosopher’s stone and the others seek the limits of what is humanly possible.

In every direction and through every mirror we will come up against Vampyroteuthis. It does not matter into which depths we delve (into theology, cybernetics, logic or psycho-sociology, to cite the most obvious examples), we will end up face-to-face with his spiteful stare and up against his sucking and crushing embrace even if we did not intend to. It is proof of our theoretical and technical “advancement”, that ultimately such encounters multiply: this is because we are progressing. The examples mentioned above prove it.

Ultimately Vampyroteuthis emerges: three in the South China Sea, or as the “death of God” of theological texts, or in the form of programmed cybernetic thought, or in the form of propositional calculus, or even in the form of a murderous romanticism such as the “Nazism” of psycho-sociology. And that is to mention only but a few examples chosen *ad hoc*. In all of these abysses (and in others), his unexpected emergence has a bomb-like effect. When Vampyroteuthis emerges, he explodes. This is because Vampyroteuthis lives under pressure, as he was “repressed” into the depths, and when he comes up, the pressure escapes and destroys the landscape. In such a way that the danger does not seem to be Vampyroteuthis

himself, but the pressure exerted upon him. That is the reason why it has long been believed, most of all during the Enlightenment, that it is only necessary to de-pressurise Vampyreuteuthis in order to make him harmless and “civilised”. What must be done, according to this opinion, is to bring him up bit-by-bit with all the technical caution available in order to habituate him bit-by-bit to the atmospheric conditions in the realm of the light of day. It was expected that the education of Vampyreuteuthis (“education” in the exact etymological meaning of the term) would humanise him. Unfortunately, our times and the recent past provide undeniable proof that such hope is false and that every attempt of the Enlightenment and of its successors was shipwrecked, that Vampyreuteuthis could not be educated or humanised, and that despite every tolerance, he is intolerable.

The reason for this is that it is not true, as it was thought by the educators, that Vampyreuteuthis is kept under human pressure. The reality is more complex. The same pressure that relegates Vampyreuteuthis to the depths supports man by giving him buoyancy. When this pressure is relaxed, Vampyreuteuthis emerges and man sinks. To humanise Vampyreuteuthis implies to vampyreuteuthise man. “To save” Vampyreuteuthis implies “to lose” man. Because not only is it true that Vampyreuteuthis inhabits the human depths, but that man inhabits Vampyreuteuthis’ depths. If the theologians elevate Hell up to Heaven they then turn Heaven into Hell. If the cybernetic programmers deliberate about the programme then they programme deliberation. If the logicians formalise thought then they start to think in forms. If the Nazis free the voice of blood then they suffocate freedom with blood. Vampyreuteuthis cannot be elevated to the bright light of day: because as he appears there emerges with him the incandescent passion of the night.

Therefore, there cannot be a “human/Vampyreuteuthis” synthesis. The encounter of both, even if carefully prepared, does not result in a spherical platonic being armed with eight extremities and two faces that is the restoration of an original lost unity.

Every encounter of both results in a hybrid in which the Vampyroteuthis is released in man and the man in Vampyroteuthis. It is at this monstrous spectacle that we stare every time that Vampyroteuthis emerges.

We must therefore doubt the enlightened educators, and even more so those who despise superficialities and who yearn for what is deep. Because what such deep spirits despise is a human humanity, and what they yearn for is a human vampyroteuthian-ness. What they aim to “save” is not Vampyroteuthis in man, but man in Vampyroteuthis. They do not aim, like the educators, to take on Evil in order to transform it into Good, but to recognise in Evil its right to exist. They do not pretend to elevate Hell into Heaven, but to romanticise Hell so that they can excuse themselves if they inhabit it.

Every exploratory expedition for Vampyroteuthis finds itself, therefore, facing two opposing dangers. On one side the Classical *Scylla* that paternalistically and “beneficially” projects the bright light of day upon Vampyroteuthis’ underdeveloped obscurantism, and on the other side the Romantic *Charybdis* that nostalgically projects itself into Vampyroteuthis’ tentacles to be sucked in by him. What every expedition must therefore endeavour to do is an acrobatic balancing act between an insistence on the intellect and a surrender to emotion. This acrobatic feat is possible if the expeditionary explorer manages to engage himself in favour of human existence in its totality, with its “superficial” side of a critical and alert intellect, and its “profound” side of an oneiric and vertiginous emotion. This engagement might permit that once Vampyroteuthis is found he may be recognised not only as the emotional nucleus of man, but equally as a supporter of the intellectual side of man. This type of expedition might allow Vampyroteuthis to emerge without exploding, and allow man to take him on without being crushed.

Unfortunately, the expeditions under way at present are of two types only: of the scientific type (on the side of *Scylla*), and of the “confessional” type (on the side of *Charybdis*). The necessary equilibrium would be that of

scientific expeditions that take on the burden of dreams, desires and fears that characterise human existence. However, the modern scientific spirit divests itself precisely of this type of burden: it desires to be unbiased and objective. That is why the Vampyreuteuthis that these scientific expeditions shall fish out of the depths of the South China Sea or out of the fisherman's depths will not be our living, palpitating antipode, but the cadaver of a specimen carefully prepared by the most advanced research methods. The Vampyreuteuthis that marine biology, or that deep psychology, or that social psychology informs us of cannot move us or enrich us because the spirit that fished him out closed itself off to him even before fishing him out. What these reports tell us are tales that reveal more about the fishing net than the fished phenomenon. These are anti-fabulous tales.

It is necessary to tell fables in which Vampyreuteuthis can act in order to change us. But these fables cannot be mere webs secreted by nightmares and dreams. They must resort to scientific nets that are the only institutions upon which we depend today in order to find our way in the depths. It is not that these fables ought to be "science fiction", that is: scientific in the service of nightmares and dreams. They must be "fictitious science", that is: the overcoming of scientific objectivity in the service of a concretely human knowledge. When it comes to the fishing of Vampyreuteuthis, it is necessary to think in a fabulous way, but so that the fable may be informed by the sciences that kill Vampyreuteuthis and prepare his cadaver for dissection and research.

The present fable is more or less informed by biology. The reason why the fable sought biology (despite the storyteller's meagre knowledge of biology) is two-fold. The first is that the Vampyreuteuthis of the depths of the sea is a biological species, and that man is himself an animal in the depths where Vampyreuteuthis lives. The second reason for the choice of biology is that in the present stage of its development, biology affords us a vision of the real, which is Vampyreuteuthis' vision.

Here is how today's biology tends to see reality. This is the "fable" told by biology: Once upon a time there was an "original cell" that contained, as virtualities, every possible life form on earth. These virtualities are being realised through distinct moves aided by blind chance, just like in a game of dice. During this game the species of living beings distance themselves from each other, and each of them represent the unrealised virtualities of all the others. Each living being is like a monster that has had all of its virtualities amputated, apart from those that characterise it. These monsters inter-devour each other, and evolution develops thanks to this generalised fratricide. During this bloody process every individual, every species, every class and every phyla dies. Until all life on Earth disappears once again, whether by catastrophe or because the general tendency of nature towards disorganisation will re-establish itself. This is an infernal, vampyroteuthian vision.

Such is the "model" of life proposed by biology, and with this model it prepares itself to initiate a new "industrial revolution", the one of biotechnology and of genetic engineering that will replace inanimate machines with animate machines and apparatus. Thus this model is nothing but the skeleton of the vampyroteuthian being-in-the-world. The present fable tried hard to cover this skeleton with the muscle of human suffering, with the fluids of human desire and the nerves of human sensibility and intelligence. And it is thanks to this rich biological model that the present fable hopes to be able to exorcise Vampyroteuthis, and to make him emerge alive.

In this way he will emerge from this fable to stare at us with his spiteful gaze. And just in this way, the author has seen his relative emerge from the aquarium of Banyuls: his spiteful gaze followed the movements of the fascinated observer. His rubber-coloured skin turned from greyish to blue and purple, most of all around the eyes. His organs for suction all along the tentacles opened and shut like valves and the jet near the beak sucked in and expelled water. As for the rest, the beast didn't move: he was stalking his prey. However, a repressed violence was

noticeable in him, as if he had mobilised all of his bestial strength so as not to break the glass and jump upon the observer with the intent of crushing him. The observer, fascinated, was also paralysed. Not only out of terror, but also embarrassment. The terror is justified because we know what would happen if the aquarium's glass broke: Nazism has taught us that. But equally justified is the embarrassment. The changes in the colouration of the skin are proof of how desperately the beast seeks to communicate with us. We do not know how to behave ourselves without causing improprieties. We cannot beat the glass with our smoking pipe in order to invite it to make idiotic gestures, as if it were a chimpanzee or a baby in a cot. Neither may we extend to it our hand in a gesture of peace that ends the mortal combat in which we have been engaged for countless millions of years. Not even may we turn our backs to him in a gesture of disgust, a preferable gesture, given our position as bourgeois intellectuals. The aquarium guard, upon seeing such embarrassment, takes the specialist's role: "Don't worry, this is nothing but a mollusc". Then what if we asked: "So why have you given it a tire to play with as if it were a chimpanzee and not a mollusc?" The guard swallows an exclamation of surprise, says something that is incomprehensible, and states that it is time to close the aquarium according to the rules of the union of which he is a member.

In this way Vampyroteuthis emerges: in the shape of relatives more or less closely related, in the aquariums of Europe and the United States, or as three cadavers in the South China Sea. Or even in the shape of giant serpents that can devour ships in humanity's myths and as ornaments on Phoenician and Greek vases. Just as much, Vampyroteuthis emerges in the shape of bloody ideologies within the political programmes of the so-called "rightwing" and in the shape of a desire for permanent orgasm, permanent revolution, in the political programmes of the so-called "leftwing". He emerges under the most unexpected psychological, logical and theological analyses, as well as in futurologies of every kind. In all

these places *Vampyroteuthis* emerges as our own mirror, as our antipode in which all of our aspects are inverted. Therefore to contemplate this mirror with the aim of recognising ourselves in it, and with the aim of being able to alter oneself thanks to this recognition, is the purpose of every fable, including this one.

**Correspondence with
Milton Vargas and
Dora Ferreira da Silva**

Excerpts from 1981 – 1990

The following are excerpts from the correspondence between Vilém Flusser and Milton Vargas¹¹ and from two letters sent to Dora Ferreira da Silva¹² during the writing process of *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*. Flusser sought an on-going dialogue with both friends in order to help him develop the manuscript for the book. The correspondence starts in 1981, when Flusser first started to work on the manuscript. The first letters introduce his new found interest in a deep-sea creature, which was a little known species by science at the time. Since then we now know considerably more about the real *Vampyroteuthis*, but at the time when Flusser started to work on the manuscript, the little data available about *Vampyroteuthis*, instead of being a hindrance, became instead an alluring mystery and an excuse to imagine.

The extracts chosen are only the ones that deal either directly or indirectly about the development of the text and its subsequent publishing and success. The letters do not “explain” the text, but serve as a clear “snapshot” of Flusser’s thinking and writing processes.

London, 12/01/1981

My dear friend Milton,

Your letter of 18/12 remained unanswered because we were so busy with the move to Robion, and for having Dinah with us. Simultaneously, I have delved into the octopus, which is sucking up my thoughts. I am concentrating on the Species *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*

¹¹ The following chapter introduces Milton Vargas.

¹² Dora Ferreira da Silva (1918-2006) was a Brazilian poet and translator. Together with her husband, Vicente Ferreira da Silva, they were part of Flusser’s intimate circle of friends.

(vampire squid from hell), which you will find in your Encyclopaedia Britannica. So that I shall answer only one of the points raised in your letter: “scientific objectivity”. The scientist and technician of which you speak, and which you judge to be dangerous as political or aesthetic (that is: existential) in your discipline, is doubly mistaken. He is mistaken for supposing that ethical and aesthetic evaluation is an action that is external to knowledge and praxis, which may or may not be “added” to knowledge and praxis, when in reality all knowledge and all praxis are from the start informed by values, otherwise they could not exist. And he is mistaken for not taking into account that his negation of values results, in reality, in the affirmation of the values of the dominant class within which he knows and acts. Calculating dams or computer programmes are political and aesthetic activities, and become “oppressive” political and aesthetic activities if not enlightened by the political and aesthetic conscience of the one who executes it. As the decent scientists and technicians do not mobilise this conscience, both “pure” science and “functional” technique are becoming today dehumanising activities. And to awaken the political and aesthetic conscience of the scientist and technician is one of the most urgent jobs with which the intellectual (philosopher, critic, essayist, etc.) is confronted. [...]

London, 13/01/1981

My dear Milton,

[...] Octopus: The eucoelomates (creatures with three layers, with abdominal cavity, specialised organs and bilateral symmetry) divided into two main branches, annelids (segmented creatures) and chordates (creatures with a spinal chord). The annelids ended up as arthropods (creatures with armour), whose most evolved representatives are insects. The chordate ended up as vertebrates (creatures with a skeleton), whose most evolved representatives are the mammals. But from annelids came the Phylum Mollusca as a lateral

development: these are creatures whose body consists of a visceral sack, mantle and molluscan foot. Typical molluscs are oysters and snails. From this phylum came the cephalopods, creatures in which the foot evolved a head complete with tentacles. Octopi are cephalopods, creatures in which the head finds itself in the middle of the foot, which have a circular brain that surrounds the mouth, a secondary skeleton with cranium, eight tentacles with several sensory organs, suckers, sexual and digestive organs, organs that emit ink, bioluminescent organs, a funnel to expel water jets for “reverse” locomotion, and the tentacles, mouth, tongue and oesophagus that are covered with teeth. Its axis of symmetry is a coil (visible in the snail shell), the larger species are monogamous, they can measure up to 20 metres in diameter, they inhabit abysses, and commit suicide when captured. Their eyes are similar to mammals’ by evolutionary convergence, and the male have three types of penises. The mouth has pliers, it functions in synchronicity with the mantle so that the creature can turn into a vortex, or seal itself hermetically. They are fast animals of prey, they swim forward with fins and movements of the mantle, and walk on the ocean floor on 2-4 arms. They walk erect with their head on the floor and the belly elevated. The eggs are laid in clusters, kept in shells and the offspring form hierarchical societies. The cranial capacity and brain activity of the larger species are comparable to that of primates. [...]

São Paulo 23/01/1981

My dear Flusser,

This is the first letter that I write to you at Robion. Best of luck with the new house! I wish you all wellbeing and a long life.

As you seem so interested in biology (especially of octopi) I am sending you a photocopy of a very interesting article about the theory of evolution and which reminded me of our conversation on the terrace of the Itatiba ranch, about the validity of the theory:

If you allow me, I believe that the article may be summed up in the following way (from three principles, which seem to be accepted):

- 1) The gradual mutation in the structural genes is the origin of the variability of organisms.
- 2) Evolutionary transformation is the result of a change in frequency of a population's genes.
- 3) The natural relationships acting upon small variations determine the direction of the evolutionary transformation: the variants that survive are the ones best adapted to the environment.

The article distinguishes between micro-evolution (transformations within a population of the same species) and macro-evolution (transformations above the level of species). For the first, there is no doubt that the three principles are applicable; all doubts are on the second – because up until now the application of the three principles to macro-evolution is mere extrapolation (it is an extrapolated conclusion from what has been observed within micro-evolution). This is the extrapolation that was discussed in the conference which the article is about.

I would sum up, in the same words as the author, as follows: there is no doubt that in general, palaeontological observations point to a continuous increase in the diversity and complexity of the species, with the origin of new species and the extinction of already established species over time. That is what I have always referred to as the “fact of evolution” that is explained by Darwin's theory of evolution.

However, says the author, in several cases the fossils do not document a smooth transition from old to new morphologies. In several cases the species are immutable for millions of years (they call this “stasis”). In other cases they suddenly disappear; some are replaced by others, which although substantially different, reveal themselves to be clearly related to the first, with the intermediary organisms missing. Is this perhaps a flaw in palaeontological data? If that is so, this could be resolved

by new findings and research, as there are thousands of geological formations still unknown. But this poses the doubt: is this a true characteristic of evolution – which is not really smooth and continuous, but full of convulsions and distortions in its aim? I believe that if this is so, then the nature of chance and probability would be affirmed, which since Mendel has been linked to evolution. Since the periods of time are enormous, there will always be the probability of radical change (improbable but possible) as well as small probabilities that everything will remain in “stasis”.

I would like to hear your opinions about all of this. I await your answer and send you and Edith a warm hug.

Robion 28/01/1981

My dear Milton,

Thank you for your letter of the 23rd and for the article “Evolutionary Theory Under Fire”¹³. I read both with great interest and I believe most important is the gap that opened between intra-specific evolution (micro) and trans-specific (macro). I also agree with you that if we accept punctual evolution (by leaps), we are face-to-face with “chance and probability”. A long phase of “stasis” followed by an accidental leap, and then a new phase of stasis. But it seems to me according to my reading and discussion that from the point of view of epistemology, the problem is elsewhere: in “convergence” and taxonomy.

Convergence: Darwinism projects the image of evolution as a “tree” with its diverging branches. Well, this image is unquestionably correct if we concentrate our attention upon the appearances of organisms (phenotypes). But if we concentrate our attention upon organs (eyes, wings, brains, etc.) the image is false. The fact seems to be the following: “nature” (to

¹³ Lewin, Roger; *Evolutionary Theory Under Fire*, Science Magazine, vol. 210, 21 November 1980. [T.N.]

anthropomorphise the problem) makes use of just a few models with which it models genetic information that is astronomically rich in possible permutations. (The DNA contains more possible permutations than there are atoms in the universe.) It is as if a player had access to an extremely rich game, although reduced by very restrictive rules. For example: organs to capture the electro-magnetic field can theoretically result from billions of forms based on the genetic information, but in fact only two have evolved: the eye as “photographic camera” (ours and cephalopods’) and the eyes with photosensitive cells in mosaics (arthropods, i.e. bees). What is curious in this is that the vertebrates’ and cephalopods’ eyes, although identical in their minimum details, (iris, retina, cornea, etc.) have a completely different phylogeny: they appear from different parts of the respective mesoderm. “They converged”. In the case of the brain the thing is even more exciting. It is possible to conceive of an uncountable number of organisational models for processing data perceived by the sensory organs, but in fact only one form emerged: supra-oesophagus, nervous ganglion, the “brain”. However, this unique “computer” model did not result from linear evolution but from convergence. In the case of chordates (our case), the brain emerged because a nerve cable stretched out along the chord, thickened at the anterior point, and then evolved. In the case of octopi (whose brain is comparable to ours), it emerged because two nerve cables surrounding the body met around the mouth and intertwined. This “thematic” poverty of life in “dialectical” contradiction with the inconceivable richness of its repertoire suggests that life is more “interested” in redundancies, that is, in unnecessary elements for information, than in variability. Darwin is under threat. So there we have two “dialectical” terms occupied by biological research: that of “homology” and that of “analogy”. “Homology” refers to the genotype: birds’ wings are homologue to our arms. “Analogy” refers to the phenotype: the wings of birds are analogue with the wings of bats. And this is an epistemological problem of first order: if the octopus brain is “analogue” with ours and

“homologue” with, let’s say, our medulla, then how do octopi “think”? An even more violent example: the octopus penis (there are three) has the shape of a spoon with a twisted handle; it serves to stimulate the female, but also to feel objects. It is “homologue” and “analogue” to our penis, but also “analogue” to our thumb. How do octopi “conceive”, if “to conceive” is to feel the outlines of objects? Sexually?

Taxonomy: Darwinism proposes a beautiful pyramidal hierarchy: at the top, the “kingdoms” (animal and vegetable). (I shall go along a single branch). Underneath the animal kingdom there are two sub-kingdoms, Protozoa and Metazoa. The Metazoans divide into three: Mesozoa, Parazoa and Eumetazoa. These divide into two: First Grade: Radiata. Second Grade: Bilateria (symmetry in 5 axes and in one axis). The Bilateria divide into three groups: Acoelomata, Pseudocoelomata, and Eucoelomata. These divide into three “sub-groups”: 1. Lophophora 2. Schizomesodermata 3. Tubulata. (octopi are schizomesodermata). The Tubulata divide into two “categories”: 1. Echinodermata and 2. Eubilateria. [I digress for a moment. The Echinodermata (starfish etc.), regressed to the five-axis symmetry abandoned by the branch millions of years previously. “They recapitulate surpassed evolution”.] The Eubilateria divide into three “phyla”: 1. Chaethognata 2. Hemichordata 3. Chordata. The Chordata divide into three “sub-phyla”: 1. Tunicata 2. Acrania 3. Vertebrata. The vertebrates divide into eight “classes”: Agnatha, Placodermi, Chondrichtyes, Osteichthyes, Amphibia, Reptilia, Aves and Mammalia. Mammals divide into several genera, these into several “families”, and these into numerous species. The same happens at every branch and at all hierarchical levels of the genetic tree. It is very beautiful, but it doesn’t work. Suppose that we define “species” as a group that interbreeds, producing fertile offspring. Well, there are cases where animals that belong, for morphological and phylogenetic reasons, not only to a different species or family, but even to different genera, and which interbreed in this way. And it doesn’t matter how a “species” is

defined; there will always be cases that don't fit. Taxonomy must be reviewed, replaced by another, less linear and more "cybernetic" (informative). This is urgent, given the existence of bio-molecular engineering. It is already possible to artificially introduce the genes of animals from different "phyla" into the genetic information of particular animals, including man, and to produce new, fertile "phenotypes". New species may emerge artificially by crossing different phyla. These are such fantastic things that the imagination fails.

To be sure: the problems dealt with by the article you sent are enthralling. But they pale in comparison to this: the challenge is not biological but epistemological; to rethink evolution not in "causal" terms or "finalistic" terms, but in "programmatic" terms.

By the way: you did not confirm receipt of "Post-History"¹⁴. Did you receive and read it?

Dear Milton: it is pure pleasure to exchange ideas with you on terrain that has always fascinated me, but which we have seldom discussed. I remember the terrace in Itatiba. Let's repeat it. [...]

Robion 29/01/1981

My dear Dora,

[...] Please let me tell you of the project that moves me at the moment. Twenty or thirty years ago, a giant cephalopod was fished out of Pacific waters, of difficult taxonomic classification (among the octopi and decapods), which received the name *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*. (Consult your encyclopaedia). Here are some of the beast's characteristics: it has a spherical brain that surrounds the mouth, equal or superior in size and complexity to ours. It has two eyes identical to ours, and ten tentacles covered with toothed siphons and several sensory organs. It walks

¹⁴ Flusser, Vilém, *Pós-História*, 1983, Duas Cidades, São Paulo, Brazil. [T.N.]

on its head with the belly elevated and inhabits the abysses between 3-8,000 meters. Its mouth, tongue and oesophagus are full of thousands of sharp teeth. It emits light and ink (sepia), can change colour, and can turn itself practically invisible. It moves backwards thanks to a funnel that emits a water jet, forwards thanks to fins, and it walks on two or six arms. The male has three phalli, one to penetrate the female's genital region, another to penetrate her mouth and caress her tongue and a third to caress her belly. The female (three times bigger than the male) lays eggs in clusters that are kept in spiral shells secreted by one of her arms and she holds them during gestation (the male aerates them constantly with oxygen). It is monogamous and lives up to eighty years of age. It can measure up to 20 meters in diameter. It eats by sucking water and secretes venom to paralyse its prey (crustaceans, but it also eats whales). Although it has a molluscan phylogeny, it is not covered by a shell (like the snail, its relative), but has a "secondary skeleton", that is, cranium and cartilaginous bones in the arms. When it secrets ink, it manipulates the sepia cloud with its tentacles to imitate in it the outlines of its own body and simultaneously becomes transparent. The lights that it emits and the skin colouration are articulations of "intimate" states, and serve as a code for intersubjective communication. Since the foot, mouth and anus have become fused in it (the ovary is elsewhere), the whole body is twisted into a coil. The coils of the spherical brain are also helicoids (like the snail's shell), and it thinks with a supra-tongue half and a sub-tongue half. It is an aggressive animal, armed with several pairs of pincers. Its internal pressure is more than 10,000 atmospheres, so that it explodes like a bomb when it is brought up to the surface. When kept in captivity under pressure, it commits suicide by devouring its own arms. There are none in aquariums, but its relatives can be found (that are for it like marmosets are for men). I am going to see them in Monte Carlo.

You may laugh if you like, but later consider this: he is our antipode in several respects; however, he is "eucoelomate" as are we. The same blood pulsates in our

veins (arteries would be more correct), the same genetic information informs him, we separated from him very late (at the stage of bilateral worms in the Cambrian), he took the route of segmentation and we of the spine. (annelids and chordates). The Devil in the depths is our brother. What for us is sublime, to him is infernal and vice-versa. Our astronomy is his geology. Our conscious mind is his subconscious. Our logic is his deep psychology, our sex his geometry. His “spoken language” (he speaks through the skin) has a sexual syntax. Our theory is his orgasm. Our culture is stored in manipulated objects; his memory (treacherous, that is: artistic) is ephemeral, and only stored in the cerebral memory of its participants. *Sursum corda*¹⁵ for him is to make it so that the heart drops down into the entrails of the Earth. For us the world is splendid (reflects sunlight). For him the world is made to shine by his bioluminescent organs. For us the “truth” is the discovery of the reality behind appearances. For him, it is the feat of making appear what the eternal night hides. For us “to think” is to organise concepts, that is: the outlines of objects felt by the fingers (*begreifen des vorhandenen*). For him “to think” is to discriminate between the influences of the world, all of them experienced sexually, since Vampyroteuthis grasps, smells and absorbs by means of sex. Our thought is mechanical, his is cybernetic. Dear Dora, “dive” with me into this adventure. *On revient toujours à son premier amour*¹⁶, or rather, *sa premier crainte*¹⁷: the Devil. This is the backdoor of the sacred. St. Anthony knows something about it. And Bosch and Kafka. [...]

¹⁵ Lift up your hearts. [T.N.]

¹⁶ It always comes back to his first love. [T.N.]

¹⁷ His first apprehension. [T.N.]

Robion 11/02/1981

My dear Milton,

Thank you for your letter of 5/02 and for “*A Revolution in Biology*”¹⁸. Although I lack the necessary information to be able to judge the article, I have the impression that it commits the sin of “false modesty”, so typical of the attitude that wishes to be science. By understatement. I say this to defend myself from your accusation of being delirious. Here is how I understand it:

Gentech: As I understood it, there are four levels in which the genetic code is deciphered. The first is of the “letter”, the second of the “word”, the third of “expression”, and the fourth of the whole sentence. The first level has been practically deciphered. All four (or eight, if the RNA code is considered as a supplementary code to the DNA) letters of the code are known, although there are still unknown pseudo-letters. The second level presents the following problem: practically every word has been deciphered, but there are so many “spelling mistakes” (exchanged letters, missing letters, letters that shouldn’t be where they are, etc.), that we have the impression that it is the one who deciphers who makes the mistakes and not the code (although it is a very important fact that the code is frequently full of mistakes). The third level (which, after all, is responsible for the programming of the organs and functions of the phenotype) seems to be the least well decoded, which makes us think: does this level even exist? The fourth level (which programmes the whole phenotype) can be decoded from two sides: molecular biology and the biology of organisms. This is where the decoding hurts Darwinism. And there is still so much to be done. So the article you sent makes use of the first level and invades the second (eukaryotic genes and genomes). My “delirium” occurs at the third level, but consider this: if I manage to

¹⁸ Reference information not found. [T.N.]

alter the order of the letters of a word, and if I manage to translate in such a way, step-by-step, a Portuguese word into an English word, will I not have created a “new species of text” even if I have not tampered with the structures of the original paragraphs? Gentech (gene technology) is taking its first steps and as of now it is evident that it will alter our vision of the origin of “species” (not even to mention the doubt that the term “species” provokes). Let us admit that this will only accelerate “evolution”, so that it will take days to do what it does in millions of years, well, this is enough to alter the process. But gentech does a lot more: it leaps over the phylogenetic barriers and exchanges information from distant “branches”. So far only at the level of the letter and word, but this is enough to overturn the fantasy. The fact that it has industrial applications (energy and medicine) only foresees something else: that it will end up creating organs and organisms. It will make the idea of the “inanimate machine” more and more archaic each day.

Mutations: These are the so-called “spelling mistakes”. At the level of the organism, of the hereditary cells, these mistakes occur constantly and with more frequency the older the organism is. They are responsible for death: we die when we make too many mistakes in transcoding messages inside the body. At the level of the egg (of the gonad) they also occur with frequency, but the majority are insignificant. Errors of “commas”, although commas have a significant importance, as well as the empty spaces between the letters. They are rarely grave mistakes, but ones that give birth to “monsters” that are not able to survive. And even more rarely these are such grave errors that a new phenotype emerges, capable of surviving in very specific circumstances. If by chance such a circumstance really exists, there emerges a new “species”. So that it is possible to say that “evolution” (a word turned suspect) happens against the “intention” of the code, as a result of an “error” by chance. (So much for your “fact of evolution”). But to grasp the absurdity of this game of permutations it is necessary to say this: there are two types of organisms, the “generalists” and the

“specialists”. For example: in mammals, generalists are those with five fingers and five toes, because this is the general mammalian blueprint. We are generalists. But the horse, which has one toe (with two atrophied), is a specialist for racing. So in the specialists the mutations are much more frequent than in the generalists, because they are themselves the results of “errors” that invite other “errors” to occur. But these mutations do not help “evolution”, because they result in even more specialists from specialists, that is: monsters. In the generalists the mutations are very rare, and can effectively result in new “species”, in new specialists. On the other hand, if the generalist is too general (the case of the famous *Drosophila*) this is also no good. New *Drosophila* species appear all the time, but also disappear again. Generally speaking, the *Drosophila* hasn’t changed, if I am not mistaken, since the Silurian.

Epistemology: Of course gentech enables a better understanding of life. According to K. Marx: we can only know what we can make. As long as “Only God can make a tree” is a true statement, we know little about life. But the Marxist sentence must be taken on with all of its dialectic. (Gramsci). To know-how-to-make is knowledge, and all knowledge (theory) is a knowing-how-to-make. Equally clear is that the methods of gentech are borrowed from other disciplines: chemistry, informatics, cybernetics, physics, etc. and it in turn reflects on such disciplines. But be careful: such transcodings are “analogies” and run the risk of losing fidelity to the phenomenon in sight. I have a vague impression that gentech is unduly turning the phenomenon of life informatic and cybernetic. What is urgent in all this effort of biological epistemology is a strong dose of Husserlian phenomenology: to constantly go back to the thing itself. Wow, I have a lot more to say, but I will stop.

Post-History: Thank you and I shall have patience. Please read it. I cannot wait to have your opinion on the matter. [...]

Robion 09/06/1981

Dear Dora,

I cannot resist the temptation to attach one translated chapter of *Vampyroteuthis*, although you have written to say that you cannot (or do not want to) follow my expedition towards the abyss. I do it because I suspect that the attached chapter, more than any other until now elaborated, will illustrate to you the fascination by which I am imprisoned. I have in this entire journey three “models”: Plato’s *Symposium*, with the myth of the perfect man as an eight-armed sphere, Bosch, and Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. And I follow three aims: 1. To attain enough distance from the human condition to be able to observe it, but a distance that is not transcendent. 2. To write a fable that is simultaneously scientifically exact and mad fantasy (*fantasia esatta*). 3. To face Evil intentionally with the spirit of “transvaluation”, but in reality, convinced that it is Evil as such that is the real religious problem. As you see: the project is ambitious. I am working on it with varied methods: I read biology, neurophysiology, psychology and the Encyclopaedia Britannica. I constantly translate parts written in German to French, English and Portuguese. I discuss it with everyone that shows up on my horizon, I go to visit aquariums, I watch films about submarine life, I seek to intuit the vertebrate, mammalian and primate foundation of my own behaviour, and I seek to read the newspapers as if I were a mollusc. For example: evolved mammals mark “symbolically” the boundaries of their breeding grounds (which are surfaces, not volumes) with urine. In order to grasp the radius of property, familial structure and nationalism, it would be necessary to proceed with a detailed examination of human urine. Another example: when the interglacial tundra of Würm wiped out the subtropical forest in the south of France (above all, in the Dordogne valley around Cro-Magnon, St. Madeleine and other caves) the thumb no longer held on to branches, it became unused, now ready to hold on to

“uninteresting objects” like stones and bones on the surface of the tundra. “Uninteresting” = non-edible, not for breeding and not dangerous. The origin of “praxis” in the lack of interest? Third example: love among primates manifests itself through the gesture of picking fleas off the “other’s” fur, hence the primate “overcoming” of the rhythm of sexual heat. The flea is the catalyst of primate love, and when swallowed provokes an internal secretion not fully studied. Since we no longer eat the fleas of the loved woman as we caress her, what has happened to the secretion: has it atrophied, or has it assumed a different function? Once the path to Evil has been taken, this branches out in a labyrinthine fashion and swallows up the traveller, especially when there is no red arrow pointing to the exit. But having this arrow, the “trip” is not worth it. I have always had the impression that those who have faith are intellectually dishonest: they have read the last page of the “thriller” and already know who killed the rich widow.

Don’t be vexed if I write these things to you without expecting an answer. You are in fact always answering, although only as an internal interlocutor. See if you can become external. [...]

New York 19/03/1986

My dear Milton,

[...] Another example: if I say that the human species is two-million years old, and the “Vampyroteuthis” species is six-hundred million, I am speaking of commensurable entities, but if I say that both men and Vampyroteuthis can reach the age of 75 years old, then I am speaking of incommensurable entities (man having hot blood obeys a rhythm incommensurable with that of Vampyroteuthis). The epistemological problem in this is that I am capable of precisely comparing incommensurable phenomena. [...]

Robion 28/02/1988

My dear friend [Vargas]:

You mentioned *en passant* the Nazi fantasies with biological aspects of a possible superman. If we oppose it to such brutal and vulgar visions of the current blazing developments in genetic reflections, we might be able to measure the distance that separates us from the pre-war period. This letter will deal with morphogenesis and this is because on 16/03 I will present, together with Louis Bec, my Vampy in Frankfurt. If you go down the genetic tree branch starting from us, you will pass by several branches that diverge from ours. At a particular point you will stumble upon an enormous branch (I believe between the Silurian and the Cambrian), which spreads out towards the molluscs. If you advance along this branch (passing by the fantastic extinct species) you will reach the cephalopods, and you will lose yourself in the hole between the decapods and octopi, where you will find a tenuous branch: Vampy. Well, as you advance along this enormous branch you will have discovered the tendency (the *élan vital*) which propels this branch. In simplistic terms: it is a tendency to twist itself. This tendency, in theory, can be found in the genetic information, be it in particular genes or in the relation that unites several genes. This tendency can be therefore formalised and fed into a computer, which will extrapolate it. Starting from Vampy, the computer will plot several biological forms contained as virtualities in the programmed tendency. (You can make the game even more fun if you amplify the parameters, not limiting it to Mendel, but including the Darwinian dialectical structure and some ecological rules). The computer shall simulate evolution, accelerating the origin of species from millions of years to a few seconds. You shall produce biomorphs that will not be empty volumes as in the case of synthesised images, but volumes in whose interior the biological tension will be acting. These biomorphs can be inverted like gloves to show the *élan vital* on the surface

(either as wire frame or another form). You can even direct evolution up to a certain point, for example emphasising brain capacity, or clitoris/penis. What you shall have produced is a biologically viable “super-mollusc”. *Fantasia esatta?* [...]

São Paulo 17/03/1988

My dear Flusser,

[...] About the Nazi fantasies with biological aspects of a possible superman, I have to remind you that they are no longer simply Nazi. As I am one in love with the “tinned” ones [characters] from TV, I am being saturated almost daily. I am recording onto video the Star Wars series for my grandchildren to watch on Fridays (there is no school on Saturdays). It is about monsters and supermen (good and/or evil) found on other galaxies that fight amongst themselves for good or evil. They are not products of biotechnology, but of evolution under different cosmic circumstances. But this comes to the same end. Your Vampyroteuthis is of the same family, although yours is a philosophical analysis and the one from TV a more or less infantile fantasy. But here everything comes to the same end.

The fact is that both you and Bec, as well as the TV producers, are on the trail of the primitive Nazis on the fantastic search for “new forms of being”. For now, thank God, this is fantasy, but gene technology threatens to turn it into reality (concrete). Your Vampyroteuthis will not be too different from the Emperor or Darth Vader (who possesses the dark side of the “force”). But it is necessary that you write urgently the biography of an animal as powerful as Luke Skywalker or Obi-something-or-other that has the light side of the “force”, capable of winning over its enemies with its “light” sabres. [...]

Robion 24/03/1988

My dear Milton,

[...] Vampy: The event in Frankfurt was excellent and the beast will have a light sabre, since Jung (from the department of “visual arts” of MIT) will try to produce a hologram of it. (This Jung was the one who helped Baumstein to create the holographic installation in São Paulo). Furthermore, a molecular biologist who watched the event will study its genetic viability, and one of the Directors of the Guggenheim, NY, is studying the possibility of exhibiting it. It was clear, in Frankfurt, that the “philosophy of fantasy” could become a discipline as rigorous as phenomenology: the diskette with Vampy, which should be ready in July (animated synthetic images), will probably be exhibited at Ars Eletronica in Linz, September 88, which is the central event of the “new way of being in the world” (or, as you put it “new ways of being”). As for your idea that this is originally a “Nazi” fantasy, I find it extremely funny and will talk about it in Stuttgart at the meeting of the Photography Academy. As for myself, I prefer to see in this fantasy the development of gothic thought (beasts on the cathedrals, bestiaries etc.), together with the *fantasias esattas* of a Raimundus Lullius (to stay in Barcelona). I suggest that you correct your “Nazi” vision as you discuss with me the beasts of the *Sagrada Familia*, since it is difficult to refer to Gaudi (and the Catalonian left in general) as “Nazi”. I would like to invite Fontcuberta (who photographs monsters, as a good Catalonian anarchist) to discuss this with you. One more word about your tinned supermen: when fantasy loses its exactness it becomes banal (I don’t know Skywalker, but I imagine him to be a lot less fantastic than, say, the pseudo-social organisation of ants). [...]

São Paulo 05/04/1988

Dear Flusser,

[...] P.S. My heartfelt congratulations on the success of Vampy. You must learn to become interested in the tinned ones [characters], your Vampy is there potentially. Remember Oscar Wilde: life imitates art (and our art is TV).

Robion 27/07/1990

My dear friend [Vargas],

[...] The copy of your article is on my desk for me to study it during a quiet moment. As an unconsidered and tentative answer I shall say this: my meeting with you was the biggest influence on my thinking, and above all, on my attitude towards life and the world. Much greater than the most spectacular meetings, such as the dialogue with Vicente [Ferreira da Silva], whom you mention, or with [Samson] Flexor, whom you don't mention. Compared only to my dialogue with Louis Bec, but more formative. Intellectually, you convinced me that "technical" discipline is synonymous with honest thinking, and that practical imagination founded on theory is the greatest human creativity (*homo sapiens* = *homo faber*). Existentially, you have always been a model of correctness, openness, and universality, based on modesty founded on incorrupt conviction. Everything that I think and write is owed to this, not only the central role that contemporary technology occupies in my discursive universe. I have sought to fight within myself my innate tendency (maybe provoked by my juvenile experiences) towards fanaticism since I have had you in aim: radicalism without fanaticism. One day I shall write about our dialogue (maybe for the Leonardo Journal). For now, I hug you in consciousness of the debt that I incurred from you. [...]

Milton Vargas
By Vilém Flusser

If the structure of the relationship with Bloch¹⁹ consists of two parallel lines that start at the same point, to then separate, cross on several levels and finally part ways again, the structure of the relationship with Vargas is another: two lines that converge from opposite poles (naturally such analysis is fleeting: both processes are continuing and point to an unknown future). There are, however, two aspects in which both of them, Bloch and Vargas (so different in all other ways), coincide: radical honesty and incredible variety. The essential existential difference between the two is this: Bloch tends towards a pure passivity, and Vargas toward an intense activity in a multitude of fields of engagement. An engineer, builder of the most important dams and roads in Brazil, theoretician of soil mechanics with international standing, an important part of the industrial development, university professor with a significant influence on academic life, essayist on philosophy and science, literary critic (especially on Romantic and para-Romantic^(sic) English poetry), editor, original thinker in the fields of religion and politics with a vision that is both universal and centred, Vargas is an anachronism today in an age of specialisation and departmentalisation: an integral and universal man in the renaissance sense of the term. But there are two problems around his person: one with internal roots and another with external roots. The first relates to his extreme modesty and consequent difficulty in doing justice to his rich personality. The second relates to an increasing disparity between his being-in-the-world and the way of current events. The result is a curious dialectic: the more he engages with the world, the more he alters it, the more he does not recognise himself in it and the more he is rejected by it. It is an exceptional case of continuous and

¹⁹ Alex Bloch (1916-) like Flusser left Czechoslovakia for Brazil. European Photography published their correspondence in 2000.

disciplined praxis based on lucid and sophisticated theory, which cannot manage to result in an authentic alteration of the self. This is why Vargas' life is tragic in the Greek sense of the term: a hero whom the *Erinyes* pursue, *Erinyes* who he himself provoked and continues to provoke. This dramatic climate emanated by Vargas is the basis for the dialogical friendship that unites us²⁰ to him.

Superficially, Vargas is our mentor *in rebus brasiliensibus*²¹ in the sense of opening for us the multiple facets of Brazilian reality. If for decades we felt sheltered from this reality, and sought to modify it by modifying ourselves, it was through Vargas' intermediation and mediation. But if we made the painful decision to distance ourselves from such an enterprise, it was also because of the rupture we felt between Vargas and the world. This rupture was the great theme of the dialogue with Vargas and continues to be so until today. Summing up: we sought for years and with increasing despair to rupture the cloak that Vargas wore to protect himself against the flux of things, which was his enemy, and we did it not only to save him, but to save ourselves, since we felt increasingly connected to him. This struggle, which almost deserves to be called "agony", and in which we almost always played the role of aggressor (although several times the aggression apparently stemmed from him), became the climate in which we acted. Everything that we wrote and continue to write is destined to be criticised by Bloch and to dismantle Vargas. If Vargas resists, we shall have been defeated. And if Vargas surrenders, wouldn't this also be a defeat for us?

In order to grasp the problem, it is necessary to return to the 1930s, formative years for both. For us these years reveal the fragility of reason, and this was cause for despair: reason was what ennobled man, and its fragility

²⁰ In his autobiography Flusser opts to refer to himself only in the first person plural, in reference to his thoughts on the inseparability of "Otherness": the recognition of the Other in One and of One in the Other. [T.N.]

²¹ In all things Brazilian. [T.N.]

opened the way to the irrational irruption of the masses. For Vargas, that period also revealed the fragility of reason, but this was cause for rejoicing: reason was what dehumanised and mechanised man and its fragility opened the way for the irruption of forces until now repressed by reason, but which are the real productive ones. Both Vargas and we suffered the crisis of reason with divided loyalty. We felt the allure of the beauty of irrational irruption, although always felt it as a mortal danger. For example: Dada, Surrealism, and the English Neo-Romantics. Vargas felt the allure of the beauty of reason although always distrustful of it. For example: current physics, all the mathematics, the new methods of technique and administration and the formal rigour of arguments. The absurdity in such divided loyalty was this: we opted for perilous reason, although all of our thoughts had tended towards the irrational side of things. And Vargas opted for the "new forces" (in the archaic reality), although all of his thoughts had tended towards the technical and scientific side of things. We were a frustrated rationalist (by our own thoughts and just by the way things were), and Vargas was a frustrated irrationalist (by his own thoughts and by the way things went after the war). One thing, however, seems unquestionable: for us current events are not surprising. The rupture of reason means putting reason at the service of irrationality, therefore at the service of mass culture, and current events are nothing but obvious consequences of Stalinism, Nazism and the *New Deal* of the 1930s. There is no rupture. For Vargas, current events are terribly disappointing because for him it seems that the tendencies of the 1930s were repressed. So it seems that we had diagnosed such tendencies "better" than he: as the irruption of the masses and not as the irruption of something new.

All of this means a profound difference in the diagnostics and prognostics of the internal and external situation, but it also means a very profitable mutual complementation that reveals reality. To start from the diagnostic side of the situation, our interest was always centred on the defeats of rationality: Wittgenstein, Kafka,

Husserl, Surrealism and the failure of the Russian Revolution. Vargas' interest was always centred on the irruption of the irrational: Jun Lawrence, the art of fantasy, and Nazism. But there were points of convergence between these interests, such as points where the irrational became rational and where reason became irrational: Heidegger, Ortega and Rilke. At these points of convergence was revealed the complementarity of both mentalities: this was the basis for the dialogues, which sought to diagnose the situation and one's own position in it. And there were apparently three preferred topics: Nazism, aesthetics and the Brazilian situation. To sum up the discussion: we diagnosed Nazism as a movement that alienated the masses, a precursor to the mass alienation of today. Vargas diagnosed Nazism as an articulation of deeply repressed tendencies, which manifested themselves as an "evil" for having been repressed, but which if assumed, could be revealed as highly productive. There was in this case for us a Marxist model and for Vargas a Jungian model. We always saw artistic articulation as an imposition of the human spirit of order upon a rebellious and perfidious object, and the "beauty of art" was always seen as the beauty of a victorious human spirit over the world's resistance. For Vargas, artistic articulation was always seen as the revelation of an essence hidden in the relationship between man and world, and the "beauty of art" was always seen as "the splendour of truth". The Brazilian situation was grasped by us as the situation of a great agglomerate of people, miserable and spoiled for some time by a domestic caste and external interests, but in which there were new tendencies, from the outside as well as the inside, which pointed to a cultural synthesis that could be established as one of the models for the "new man" (as is happening for example in China). We always began such analysis from our linguistic experience, and our engagement was always aimed at this objective. Vargas grasped the situation as one of a country on the path of a slow and profound revolution, situated in a South American context, and which would slowly assume a decisive role on the international stage, but was threatened

to lose its identity in such an advance. Apparently, therefore, they were three disconnected themes in which each saw reality according to incongruent categories. At bottom, however, there was and there is a substratum common to all three themes, there was and there is a convergence of categories. The common substratum is that in all three topics of exchange the rational is opposed to the irrational, and we always sought the absorption of the irrational by reason, while Vargas always sought the "assumption" of the irrational. In the case of Nazism, we opted against it because there was no possibility of assimilating such barbarity, and Vargas opted for a, let's say, "sublimation" of Nazism. In the case of art we opted for innovative experiences that sought to formalise lived experiences, and Vargas opted, at bottom, against every attempt to formalise lived experiences. In the case of the Brazilian reality, we opted for a conscious rationalisation of irrational tendencies on a new level, and Vargas opted for a limited rationalisation up to a level that allowed for an irruption of Brazilian mentality (largely irrational) into the human scene at large.

Over the course of the dialogues, both were modified. We saw ourselves forced to admit the pertinence of several of Vargas' analyses. In effect: Nazism was not a pure mass movement, it was also a depreciation of repressed tendencies, which by themselves were overwhelming when articulated by, for example, Nietzsche. We had not seen this because from up close Nietzsche was nothing but one of the deceitful Nazi slogans, and because the Nazi reality was anti-Nietzschean. Vargas taught us to see with a more revealing distance. In effect: there is in art an element that "reveals the essence" that cannot be exhausted by formal analyses, and which therefore escapes a critique immersed in time. Vargas taught us to admit this mystery in art, which we had always felt but without the courage to admit it (because of an assumed anti-romantic engagement). It is curious to have to honestly admit that we felt this mystery more intimately than Vargas, because our artistic sensibility was more developed than his. In effect: it was worth engaging with Brazil if only

because there is something that is hardly describable in the Brazilian character which deserves to be preserved and turned into a strong influence on the human scenario at large. Vargas not only taught us to see such a thing, but also quintessentially demonstrated it with his own being-in-the-world. The modification produced in us by Vargas can be summarised thus: we came to admit, with serious reservations, that after all there were values (all of which extra-rational) in favour of which it was worth living (and even possibly dying). In this way Vargas was the propelling motor of our engagement.

It is difficult to say what the alterations were that we produced in Vargas. The opening through which we infiltrated was perhaps a double contradiction in his personality. A contradiction between his human decency and his visceral humanism on one side, and his global and de-existentialising vision and his theoretical anti-humanism on the other. The other contradiction was between his engagement in favour of technologising, and therefore Europeanising, the environment on one side and his Romantic yearning for bygone days on the other. This contradiction was not present in Vicente Ferreira da Silva²² who was a great influence on Vargas, and the consequence of this is that the dialogue with Vicente happened in an entirely different climate. In any case, one thing seems unquestionable: the dialogues shook Vargas down to his foundations, but they resisted. This shall be discussed a little later.

As for the prognostics of the situation and of our own position within it, the differences grew over the course of the dialogue instead of shrinking. Although the influence that Vargas exerted upon us had powerfully contributed towards engagement, they also contributed towards a growing pessimism. The world which Vargas represented and in which he engaged seemed ever more

²² Vicente Ferreira da Silva (1916–1963) was a friend and important Brazilian philosopher who greatly influenced the thought and work of Vilém Flusser.

unbearable and anachronistic, and the way in which Vargas closed himself to the new proved it existentially. The vision that we had of Brazil revealed itself to be ever more illusory, and the vision that we had of the “new man” (so intimately linked to the Brazilian engagement) revealed itself to be ever more a projection to cover up the absurdity of events. Precisely because Vargas pointed to the possibility of particular values, we felt obliged to measure such values against reality and thus verified their vacuity. In this way we, although greatly enriched by Vargas, returned to the starting point: the recognition of the absurdity of any kind of engagement. Vargas, however, opted always more decidedly in favour of an engagement in several fields that he knew to be in vain, and to this knowledge we were a contributor. His pessimism (equally as radical as ours) continues, therefore, covered over by action and paradoxically, for Vargas action is the opium that allows him not to see the world and himself in it.

This testament to an intense dialogue seems melancholic for its results. But the profound reality lived by both contradicts this. Because what was questioned during the dialogues was not this or that problem (this was nothing but a pretext), but what might be referred to as “human vocation”. That is why the dialogue happened (even during apparently frivolous moments) in a religious climate. And it was in this climate that the complementarity of both revealed itself to be extremely fertile. One did not only learn to tolerate the other’s vocation, but to recognise in it our other side. It was not about, at this level, coming to know the other’s position, but of recognising it and recognising oneself in it. Vargas was our opposite, both in his way of thinking and of acting in the world. And this was the opposite side that was missing in us. We became integral in our contact with Vargas. We saw the world inside-out and saw ourselves inside-out. And certainly, the same happened to Vargas. We were immersed by Vargas in obscure regions that we did not have the courage to see even during the moments of greatest despair, because Vargas showed us the most seductive aspects of such depths. And Vargas in turn was

humanised by us, and learned, painfully, to see the beauty of the existential side of the great ideas he upheld. This was an important aspect of the dialogue: we always existentialised Vargas' essences (his "great inhuman and anti-human concepts"), and Vargas always provoked the essential in the existential decisions made by us. But there is asymmetry in this: we were able to absorb Vargas' "essences" and adapt our decisions accordingly. But given the rigidity of every "essential" thought and action (of "faith" or "fanaticism"), Vargas was never able to absorb the existential impact that we represented to him. He was always on the defensive, fearing to crumble, something that we did not fear for having gone through it.

However, the most radical aspect of the dialogue was this: one's very existence problematised the other's existence. They were mutually negating. And this is the true religious dialectic (that which the Talmud and the Gospel call "love for the other"). One was not possible because of the other, and therefore, one was not possible without the other. And this dialectic can only be resolved in the Totally Other. The shock of both existences, irreconcilable and therefore needing each other, constantly provoked Totality. In the beginning the fact that this dialogue is "at bottom" a prayer and a plea *de profundis* was not recognised by either, but over time became ever more evident. Faced with this provocation (also ambivalent), both were at times taken by humility, feeling almost physically that we were nothing but tools of Something^(sic) unnameable. But here we come closer to the Wittgensteinian limit, and it is best to be quiet. The "agony" of both is not yet finished, after all, and for being such opposites, both feel encouraged by the enthusiasm to fulfil different vocations.

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